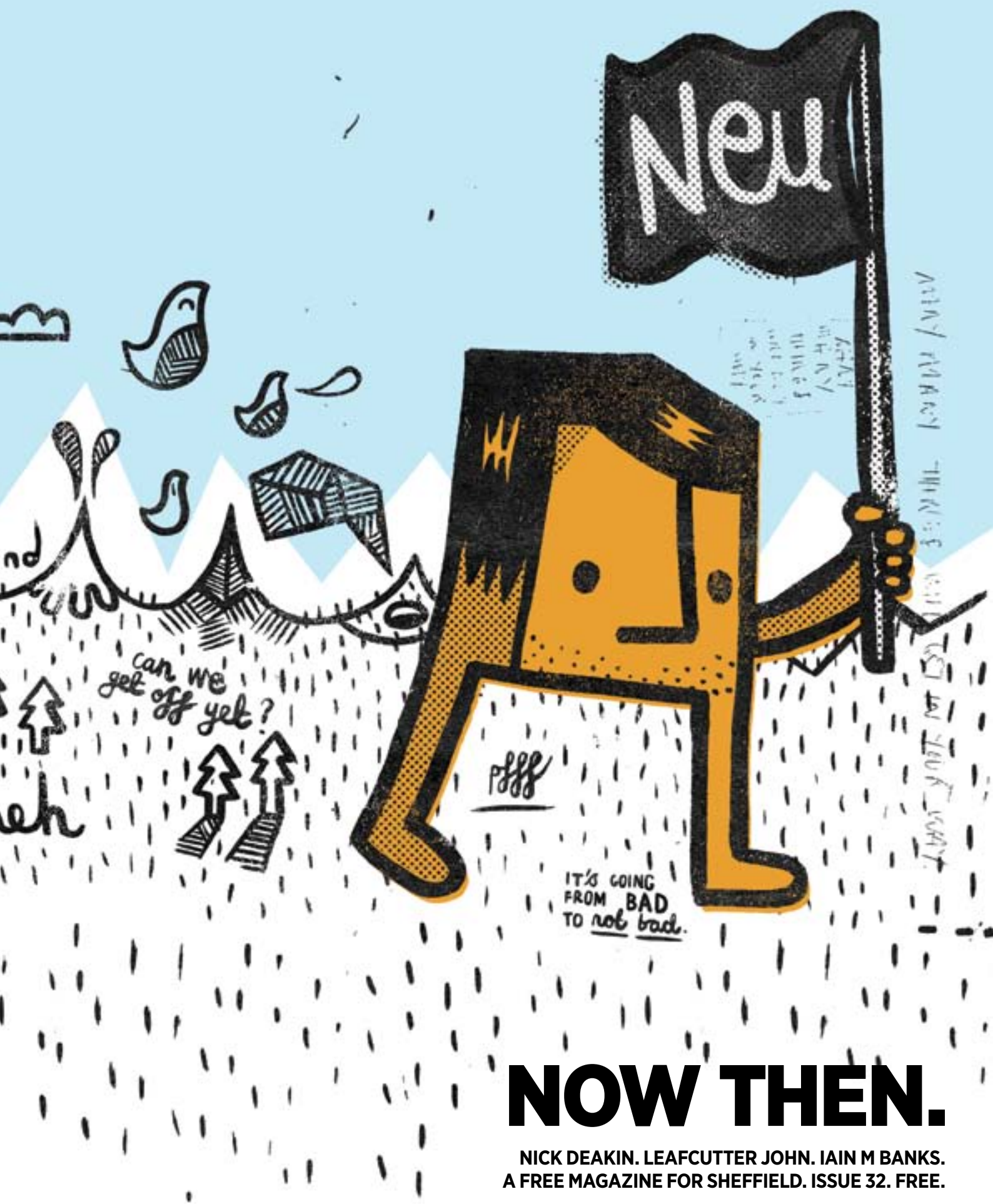




NOW THEN.

NICK DEAKIN. LEAFCUTTER JOHN. IAIN M BANKS.
A FREE MAGAZINE FOR SHEFFIELD. ISSUE 32. FREE.

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NOW THEN IS A FREE MONTHLY MAGAZINE FOR PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD.

We aim to cultivate choice, voice and responsibility by providing a platform for independent art, trade, music, writing and local news. We support Sheffield's economy by only working with independent traders, community groups, charities and local government.

Almost all articles published in this magazine are written by members of the community, not professionals. If you don't like what you read or have something that needs to be said, get in touch. Your opinions make Now Then what it is.

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EDITORIAL.

As you will have noticed unless you are incredibly inattentive, we have been experimenting with formats over the last couple of months in line with our expansion from 5,000 to 10,000 circulation. This time around we've opted for a thicker cover and an uncoated interior. Let us know what you think about it compared with previous issues.

This month we've bagged an interview with sci-fi space opera author Iain M. Banks, who has just published Surface Detail, the ninth novel in his highly-acclaimed Culture series. The man is ferociously imaginative and knows his own mind. Go to page 20 to read more.

It has taken us two and a half years, but now we have more space we've finally been able to fit MediaLens in Now Then, a media watchdog that questions international news providers, political affiliations and corporate backslapping in a marvellously thorough way.

Leafcutter John is our music interviewee, a member of the ever-appreciated modern jazz band Polar Bear and an accomplished solo artist in his own right. Geeky audio talk abounds.

I know I say this every month, but seriously – send us your opinions. We've got more space than ever to print articles by local writers. I mean you. Don't look over your shoulder. You. The one who has strong ideas and journalistic aspirations, but can't find the time or motivation to put pen to paper. I'd like to say it's your loss, but it's ours as well. If you don't try, you will never know.

SAM.

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LOCALCHECK.

CHIPPING AWAY BEHIND THE HEADLINES.

HOSTED BY ALT-SHEFF.

SOMETHING STRANGE HAS HAPPENED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE.

It's cooled down again. I don't mean that it isn't real - it's definitely still happening - but we've got another crisis to worry about now. It's the stupid economy hitting the rocks, and when people start rioting in European cities, the political and wealthy classes come to attention. That's a bit too close to their nice houses. Nevermind the melting icecaps or the parched Sahara, they want this one sorting out first - or instead.

Do you remember when MPs expenses jeopardised democracy itself? Or when global Islamic terrorist networks were a threat to civilisation? It seems we can't get enough of threats. Writers like Ulrich Beck have called our modern industrialised life a 'risk society'. We're supposed to anticipate and adapt to risk more than any previous society. Rubbish.

The Metro-reading public are herded from one worry to another without time to think, nor the means to tell truth from lies. Information overload? Not really, because to call it information is to over-value it. Much of the media we consume starts in press releases from businesses and governments with their own agenda. The power over our minds is the one they're really after. This is made clear in a new film called Psywar, which had its UK launch at the Sheffield Social Centre collective's recent Free School. It can be watched online by following the link from Sheffield Indymedia's feature about the Free School.

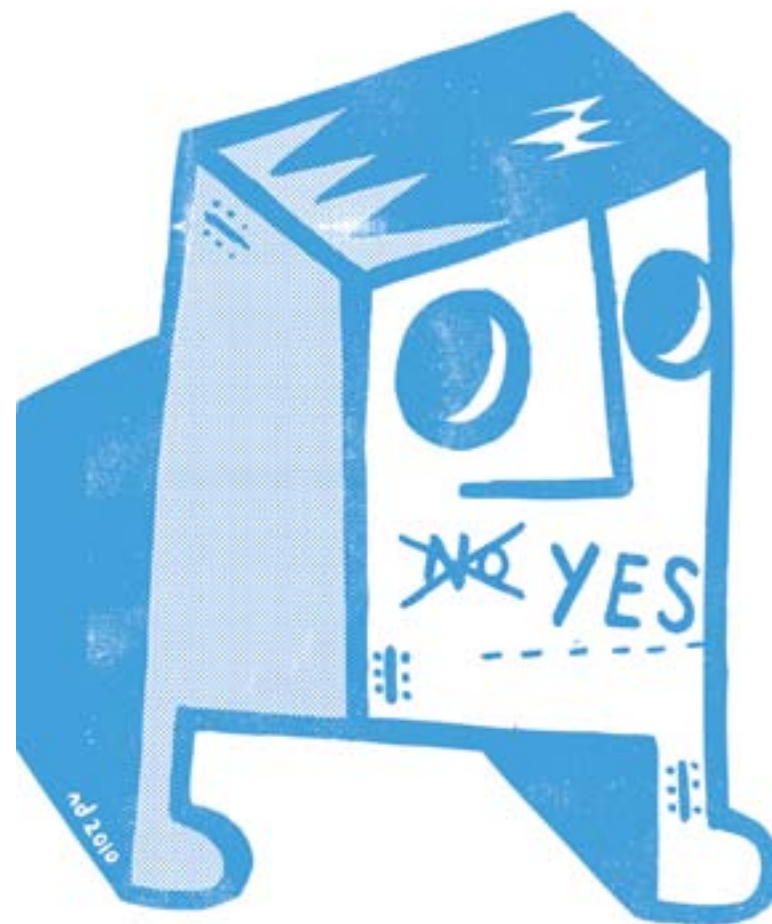
There are so many threatened crises they can't all be true, can they? As usual the activists chipping away behind the headlines think they know what's really going on. There is a massive global threat to our existence. What is it? Well, it's not easily explained in one phrase like 'Islamic terrorism'. In fact that's a complete side issue, as we now know, that turned out to be a few odd blokes in Leeds, and populations in places like Afghanistan very pissed off with foreign interests interfering. So what it's really all about is a combination of two centuries or more of industrial processes ripping up the planet's surface, mixing up deadly chemical concoctions and pouring them into the biosphere, and aggressive capitalism with dodgy governments twisting public understanding of things. Global warming? Quite nice really. But call it climate chaos, or global dehydration, and suddenly it's not so cosy. There is new evidence that cyclical solar radiation affects cloud formation, which masks the real impact of climate change every few years (remember where you heard this first!) But climate will soon be back at the top of the crisis agenda in a massive way.

Why should anyone in a small city like Sheffield do anything about this? We all have to get up, work and pay the bills, and demonstrating isn't going to change anything, is it? I'd have to agree, but I still go to demonstrations. One reason is that I learn more from the leaflets and speeches there than I do from the media. I meet people who also see through the media's miasma of nonsense. I realise every time that there are a lot of us and that we're growing stronger. It doesn't matter that every battle isn't won, because change is a process. The next generation will see the result of the green revolution, which has been building since the 60s, or they'll die trying.

Sheffield's environmental movement includes the ever-growing Green Party and Sheffield Renewables, which will be doing its 'people's share offer' soon. In October, a flash mob event about climate change in the Peace Gardens brought an American idea about mobilising people to Sheffield. Sheffield Campaign Against Climate Change is also running a lecture series called Plan 2050, which you might just catch the end of this month. These people know more about what's got to be done than the average Metro-reader or city councillor. Apologies to the elected members - many good people I'm sure - but there are things they just don't have the time or knowledge to look into like the pressure groups can.

But why should they - or we - listen to these pressure groups? The alternative is to listen to the business interests who got us into this mess. Carry on reading the Metro, everything will be alright...

Look up some of the activities and groups on Alt-Sheff and find out what's really going on.





MAKING NOTES.

THE BRIXTON POUND.

IAN CRACKNELL.

In September 2009, Brixton hit the national headlines with the news that it was to launch its own local currency, the Brixton Pound (B£).

In discussing the story with a friend, I told her that I thought this was a brilliant thing - a vehicle for independent business to invest in itself, enabling like-minded individuals to put their money where their mouths are in direct support of local trade, keeping their hard-earned within the local economy. To my disbelief, my friend disagreed. She didn't think it would work. It was idealistic. It was unrealistic. In summary, she didn't think it was a good idea. I vowed to return to the issue a year later, as I had not just every hope for the project's success, but every belief that this was a worthwhile, workable idea to strengthen independent trade within the community. I really wanted my friend to be wrong about this.

Of equal value to your regular pound sterling, the B£ isn't designed to replace our national currency, but to complement it, working to retain the diversity of traders on Brixton's high street and markets. It isn't the only local currency in the UK - there is the Totnes Pound in Devon, the Lewes Pound in Sussex and the Stroud Pound in Gloucestershire. These local currencies seem to be part of a growing global zeitgeist of supporting local independent trade and betterment of the environment by supplying consumer needs locally. The B£ was set up by a group of volunteers from Transition Town Brixton, a community-led organisation which is part of an international umbrella movement for action on energy issues and climate change.

Local currencies are not a new thing. They've been in existence since the Middle Ages, and for centuries they were the only kind of money there was until European countries developed their own national currencies. But despite the concept's long history, the project raises difficult questions. The B£ can't be banked, so with both interest and lending removed from the financial circuit, isn't the currency redundant for true investment in business and the local economy? As our financial transactions become increasingly paperless, doesn't the future of a paper-only currency look doubtful?

The former is a definite sticking point, and one that has already caused some businesses to opt out of the scheme, having found the process of exchanging the notes to be a hassle. But maybe that's the key - instead of exchanging them, maybe they should be spending them on supplies from their fellow B£ trading stores. A potential answer to the second problem could also counteract the negative side-effect of the first, because Transition Town Brixton is currently working on a digital platform for mobile phones, potentially removing paper from the equation.

So how do you measure the success of such a project? How about expansion? One year on, over 170 shops, restaurants, cafes and market traders in Brixton now accept the B£. There's very little you can't buy with the currency, from food, electronic goods, hardware and garden products to the services of pharmacists, drycleaners, solicitors and even architects. As an additional incentive, shoppers also receive selected discounts and special offers when making purchases with the B£. Even the local council, Lambeth, is working to enable people to pay their bills with the currency. How about the increased media profile for Brixton? Lambeth Council has estimated the value of the project's national publicity campaign to be £10,000. The benefit to the shops is obvious - all participating businesses receive free advertising, marketing and publicity just by agreeing to take part in the scheme. There are a few places on the list that I'd like to make a point of visiting next time I'm in London, particularly The Bureau of Silly Ideas, where one can apparently indulge in theatre, pie-throwing and making robots. I mean, who wouldn't want to support that?

I still believe the Brixton Pound is a good thing and I'm happy to confirm that it continues to enjoy every success. It has succeeded in promoting an idea to the nation: that we can take greater control of the financial mechanisms within our communities, for the benefit of our much-loved independent shops and businesses, our relationship with them as consumers, our investment in the local economy and our impact on the environment. Sheffield Pound, anyone?

brixtonpound.org / transitionnetwork.org



EGGY CLEGGY.

THAT BASTARD.
FRASER BAYES.

I want to make a confession - I voted for the Liberal Democrats in the general election and now I feel like a cheap whore who has walked up and down Sunset Strip one too many times.

While I'm at it I may as well confess that I have had to completely rewrite this article four times in the last month, as every week I am more appalled at what is being done by the Lib Dems in government. I accept that they had to go into a coalition with the Tories, as the math to go with Labour wasn't there, but do they have no principles? Have they abandoned everything they stand for? All seemingly in the lust for power.

The biggest change of late has to be university tuition fees. Most people don't know what the Liberals stand for, as they historically get little press coverage, but I bet most students know that virtually all Lib Dem MPs signed a pledge saying that they would oppose any rise in fees. Now we see the appalling shame of Nick Clegg's 'new politics', fighting an election on one thing and less than six months later abandoning it. £7000 a year is the new suggestion.

He has worried many in his party by just how comfortable he seems in coalition with a Conservative government, not least the four out of ten people who voted for his party who said they would not have done so if they knew he would jump into bed with the Tories. Even with a margin of error of two, this is still well over a million people.

During the election, the Lib Dems also fought against 'Tory cuts', saying huge cuts to the state while the economy is still fragile would risk a double dip recession. I agreed with that. Nobel Prize-winning economists agreed with that. Clegg will have us believe that right in the middle of the coalition negotiations, the Eurozone was in trouble due to levels of Greek debt and this caused him and his party to completely reverse their economic position. You will have to excuse me if I find this ridiculous.

I would like to say this to Nick Clegg: do not insult the British people's intelligence. Britain is the sixth richest country in the world. We are not Greece, who are twenty sixth - our economy is nearly six times bigger and as a nation we have not defaulted on our debt for hundreds of years.

During the election, the Labour party pledged £80 million in loans to Sheffield Forgemasters, so it could invest in new equipment to meet a huge new order. Clegg first claimed that the shareholders would not 'dilute their share equity'. He has since stated that it was 'simply an issue of affordability'. I would take it one step further and say it is simply an issue of ideology. Mr Clegg does not believe that the state should support industry in what is quite clearly a right-wing position. The loan would have been paid back with interest, but this opportunity has now passed and the contracts have no doubt gone to China or India.

What I am aghast at is the nature in which the Lib Dem top brass is conforming to the Tory agenda. The Conservative manifesto stated that the party would affect little change to the NHS if elected, while the Lib Dems said something similar. Now what we have is the biggest structural reform of the NHS in its history, with GPs to be given control of budgeting. Let me put this straight: this government has no democratic mandate to do this. The NHS is the envy of the world. Universal health care for all - one of the great legacies of socialism. If the Tories or Liberals said during the election that they were planning this they would have been annihilated at the polls. The coalition is aiming to undermine the NHS and farm out healthcare to a number of the huge American companies that put profit before lives. We must fight this injustice for the sake of ourselves and future generations.

A democracy is only as strong as its citizens make it. If you are unhappy with Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats, let them know by emailing them via writetothem.com.



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I find it annoying to pay late fees on movies and I am too lazy to return them on time, which leaves simply complaining about it. I used to know a guy named Matthew who would sell me copies of the latest movies for five dollars each, but they were all recorded by someone in a cinema with what appeared to be a low-resolution web cam and epilepsy. Several times during each movie, the person would shift positions or have people walk past and one time filmed the chair in front of him for at least twenty minutes. Matthew’s statement was that he did not know the quality before he got them but in one, the person filming answered his phone with “Hello Matthew speaking” and when I mentioned it to him he stopped selling me movies.

27B/6.

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Dear Megan,

Thank you for your letter regarding overdue fees. As all four movies were outstanding examples of modern cinematic masterpieces, your assumption that I would wish to retain them in my possession is understandable, but incorrect. Please check your records as these movies were returned on time over three weeks ago. I remember specifically driving there and having my offspring run them in due to the fact that I was wearing shorts and did not want the girl behind the counter to see my white hairy legs.

Regards, David.

Hi David

Our computer system indicates otherwise. Please recheck and get back to me.

Kind regards,

Megan

Dear Megan,

Yes, they are definitely white and hairy. Viewed from the knees down, the similarity to two large albino caterpillars in parallel formation is frightening. People who knew what the word meant might describe them as ‘piliferous’, although there is something quite sexy about that word so perhaps they wouldn’t.

Regards, David.

Hi David

No I mean our records indicate that the DVDs have not been returned. Please check and return as soon as possible.

Kind regards,

Megan

Dear Megan,

With the possible exception of Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay, the movies were not worth watching, let alone stealing. In Logan’s Run, for example, the computer crashed at the end when presented with conflicting facts and blew up, destroying the entire city. When my computer crashes I carry on a little bit and have a cigarette while it is rebooting. I don’t have to search through rubble for my loved ones. The same programmers probably designed the Blockbuster ‘returned or not’ database.

Also, while one would assume the title Journey to the Centre of the Earth to be a metaphor, the movie was actually set in the centre of the earth which, being a solid core of iron with temperatures exceeding 4,300 degrees Celcius and pressures of 3,900 tons per square centimetre, does not seem very likely.

Waterworld was actually pretty good though. My favourite bit was when they were on the water but the scene when Kevin Costner negotiated for peace, ending the war between fish and mankind moments before the whale army attacked, was also very good.

Regards, David.

David

The DVDs are listed as not returned. If you cant locate the DVDs, you will be charged for the replacement cost.

Megan

Dear Megan,

I have checked pricing at the DVD Warehouse and the cost of replacing your lost movies with new ones is as follows:

Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay - \$7.95

Waterworld - \$4.95

Journey to the Centre of the Earth - \$9.95

Logan’s Run - \$12.95

I have no idea why Logan’s Run is the most expensive of the four movies as it was definitely the worst. Have you seen it? I wouldn’t pay \$12.95 for that. I would use the money to buy a good movie instead. Probably something with Steven Seagal in it. The entire premise comprised of living a utopian and carefree lifestyle with only three drawbacks - wearing seventies jumpsuits, living in what looks like a giant shopping centre and not being allowed to live past 30. This would seem logical, though, as I would not want a bunch of old people hanging around complaining about their arthritis while I am trying to relax at the shopping centre in my jumpsuit trying not to think about the computer crashing.

I was recently forced to do volunteer work at an aged care hospital. Footage of these people during Tuesday night line dancing could be used as an advertisement for the Logan’s Run solution. The only good aspect of working there was that I halved their medication, pocketing and selling the remainder, explaining the computer listed that as their dose and that they were welcome to check, knowing their abject fear of anything produced after the eighteenth century would prevent them from doing so.

I also swapped my Sanyo 14-inch portable television for their Panasonic widescreen plasma while they were sleeping, explaining that it had always been that way and their senility was simply playing up due to the reduced dosage of drugs.

Regards, David.

Hi David

I have not seen those movies so I dont know what you are talking about. I prefer romantic comedies. If you have the movies we can’t rent them so we lose money and the fees are based on what we would have made from renting them and we also have to purchase movies through our suppliers not from DVD Warehouse.

Megan

Dear Megan,

I myself am also a huge fan of romantic comedies. Perhaps we could watch one together. I have a new Panasonic widescreen plasma. My favourite romantic comedy is Fatal Instinct, although it did not contain enough robots or explosions in my opinion and I was therefore unable to truly identify with the main characters on a personal and emotional level.

Recently, I was tricked into watching The Notebook which was about geese. Lots of geese. It also had something to do with an old lady who conveniently lost her memory so she could not remember being a whore throughout the entire film. I don’t recall a lot of it as I was too busy being cross about watching it. In a utopian future society she would have been hunted down and killed at 30.

In regards to the late fees, I understand the amount is based on what you lose by not being able to rent the movies out. You probably had people lined up around the block waiting to rent Logan’s Run. For \$82 though, I could have purchased six copies of it from DVD Warehouse or, as I have heard he is a bit strapped for cash, had Kevin Costner visit my house in person and re-enact key scenes from Waterworld in my bathroom.

Regards, David.

Hi David.

Restocking fees are:

Journey to the Centre of the Earth - \$9.30

Logans Run - \$7.90

Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay - \$6.30

Waterworld - \$5.70

Total - \$29.20

I have deleted your late fees and noted on the computer that the amount owed is for the replacement movies not fees.

Kind regards,

Megan

Dear Megan,

Those prices seem reasonable. I do not want Logan’s Run but will pick up the other three when I come in next.

Regards, David.

What? The \$29.20 is the cost of the replacement DVDs for the store.

Megan

Dear Megan,

That makes more sense. I was wondering what I was going to do with two copies of each movie.

Regards, David.

What do you mean by two copies? Are you saying you found the four movies?

Megan

Dear Megan,

Yes, they were on top of my fridge the whole time. Unfortunately I have a blind spot that prevents me from seeing this area of the kitchen as it is also where I keep my pile of unpaid bills.

Last night I slept on the kitchen floor with the fridge door open due to my air conditioner being broken and the temperature outside exceeding that of the centre of the earth. As my fridge emits a high-pitched beep every 30 seconds when left open, the vibrations from this caused the DVDs to wriggle forward over the space of many hours before toppling from the edge and I awoke to find them beside me on the pillow. As you have already waived the late fees, I will drop them off tonight and we will call it even.

Regards, David.

Ok.





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SURFACE DETAIL.

THE NEW CULTURE NOVEL BY IAIN M. BANKS.

REVIEWER – FRED OXBY.

OCTOBER SAW THE RELEASE OF IAIN M. BANK’S LONG-AWAITED NEW NOVEL SURFACE DETAIL, THE MOST RECENT ADDITION TO HIS CELEBRATED SCI-FI SERIES ABOUT A MISCHIEVOUS, ANARCHO-COMMUNIST CIVILISATION CALLED THE CULTURE.

The Culture is a society of humans and super-intelligent machines that has reached dizzying heights of technological advancement. It is run almost entirely by drones and the staggeringly brainy minds of spaceships, leaving its human citizens to pursue lives of hedonism, far from the conflicts of the greater galaxy. As powerful and moral as they consider themselves, they are seldom above meddling in the business of other less advanced civilisations, often attempting to push their own ethical agenda through their shady Special Circumstances unit. Surface Detail rejoins the series in a late stage of the Culture’s development as it attempts to bring an end to one of the last remaining horrors of the Galaxy.

Banks imagines that among the many bewildering techno feats of the future, the ability to save the brain state of an individual into a computer substrate has allowed many civilisations to create afterlives for their people. Although most are pleasant, heavenly environments, many are also hells that punish wrongdoing past the point of death in a virtual environment of pain and suffering. The debate over whether these hells are civilised and morally justifiable has lead the galactic community into a virtual war that now threatens to spill out into reality.

The story follows six characters as they play different but no less crucial roles in an ever-escalating conflict over life and death itself. While at first these stories seem as disparate as they could be, Banks shows himself to be a master of his craft by slowly bringing these threads together into an epic showdown in space, virtual reality and aboard the awesomely powerful ships of the Culture. Not only is it narratively phenomenal, but it is also filled to the brim with wonderfully imagined details of the galaxy the plot inhabits. There are ancient habitats controlled by mysterious AIs, there are destructive swarms of matter which annihilate the fibres of the universe and there are spaceships that pack out into armadas of smaller warships in nano-seconds. Each chapter presents the reader with more ideas and complexities, completely absorbing them.

While definitely a work of fantasy, Surface Detail contains frequent allusions to our own society and its habits. The concept of torture and punishment is as real for us now as it may well be in the far-flung future, while the Culture’s incessant meddling in the affairs of others could easily be compared to the behaviour of the more powerful states on present-day Earth. It might be going too far to call Banks a moralist, but his works have always contained strong political messages that transcend the fabric of his scenarios and give his novels a dimension that elevates them far beyond mere science fiction. He uses his galaxy to compare and contrast many different yet familiar political models without overtly favouring one over the other. Like other greats of the genre like H. G. Wells, Phillip K. Dick and William Gibson, Banks’ books work on many more levels than the weird and wonderful realms his characters inhabit and there are more truths between the lines than ever, all framed in a disturbingly fertile imagination.

His newest outing is fairly typical of most of Banks’ Culture novels, written with skill and aplomb and displaying a staggering mind for dreaming up pleasing technologies and macabre plot twists at every turn. That said, there are still minor gripes to be had here. His highly descriptive style occasionally compromises the flow of the book. Sentences can sometimes drag on and some paragraphs end up feeling too convoluted, occasionally needing more than one read before they make any sense. Some have also fairly criticised his characters for being hard to sympathise with. Indeed, almost all of Surface Detail’s cast are essentially sociopaths, meaning that readers who demand a more positive outlook from protagonists may well find themselves disappointed.

Surface Detail has all the hallmarks that established Banks fans will know well from his previous Culture books, as well as plenty to interest the first time Banks reader. While seasoned Banksonians will relish a return to the Culture universe, there are few ideas that are not explained for the benefit of newcomers. The book transports readers into the far-flung future, where the galaxy is populated by a host of civilisations of varying technological prowess, while maintaining a sense that what is being discussed is not so far from home after all.



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Since the publication of Iain M Banks’ first science fiction novel Consider Phlebas in 1987, he has enjoyed an ever-growing cult following. While he divides his time between his sci-fi and mainstream books, his latest work Surface Detail (reviewed on page 16) brings readers back into the realm of the Culture, a utopian vision of humanity in the far-flung future. Now Then caught up with Iain to discuss the novel, his thoughts on the Culture and (inevitably) present-day politics.

How did you get into writing?

I wanted to be a writer in primary school. I discovered when I was quite young that there was such a thing as a professional writer and I decided I want to be one. I started trying to write novels when I was about 14. I wrote my first - not a very good one - when I was about 16 and just kept on going. I didn’t get anything published until I was about 30.

Which authors have inspired you?

Too many to mention. I get inspired by everything that means something to me. No single person, but what you might call the usual suspects. I’d like to think I’ve been inspired by Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Jane Austen, but I think you’d struggle to find any influence in my books.

What are your ideal conditions for writing?

I like to be at home, sitting at my desk and listening to music. I normally play a mixture of Radio 1 and Radio 3, but if there’s too much talking I tend to put on a CD or a playlist. I have found that Bach is very good. His piano and harpsichord works seem very useful. I make it as close to office hours as possible to fit in with the lives of my friends with normal jobs, so I try to get it done within the working week. It doesn’t always work though - sometimes I wake up at 4am and know that I have to start writing, but I try to keep it fairly controlled.

What was the starting point for writing Surface Detail? How do you think it builds on past Culture novels?

It comes from an earlier novel called Look to Windward, which features a civilisation that had a sort of electronic Valhalla, a place where the recorded consciousnesses of their fallen dead could go to exist after death. I decided this idea was too good for only one society and that it was the sort of thing all civilisations would be prone to. After that I thought it’s all very well having heavens, but I wouldn’t be surprised if a crowd with a cruel streak might also invent hell, maybe quite a few hells. I thought I’d network them together. This idea formed the basis of the strategic part of the book; this idea of having a war in the heavens.

Surface Detail seems to focus on a less explored element of the Culture universe – virtual reality or immaterial existence through ‘sublimation’. Is this a direction you intend to pursue further?

Yes, it is. I think it’s quite likely that the next Culture novel will be a bit more about the idea of subliming. It’s still quite a vague idea, but it could be at the fore of the next one. It’s to do with withdrawing from the day-to-day life of society, although on a much grander scale. To be honest, my thoughts are still developing on this subject and how best to express it.

Is the Culture a utopia?

Absolutely. I think it’s as close to a utopia as we are going to get. I can’t imagine anything better, as long as we are dealing with beings that are human in some recognisable sense. But it doesn’t read that way. The books are filled with violence and death, and that’s because I have to go to the extremes of the Culture, the outside skin of it and the way it interacts with others civilisations, to find the stories that I like. In its everyday life, the Culture is just a group of people having enormous fun. I worry for anyone who doesn’t think the Culture itself is a proper utopia.

Is that why many of your charaters seem to be sociopaths?

Yes - outsiders at the very least. It’s just so they have a different perspective on it. Frankly, your average Culture citizen would be too wishy-washy, traumatized by the first wiff of gunpowder or any equivalent thereof. Drones can switch on and off, but humans probably aren’t even able to withstand military training.

To what extent is the Culture a vessel for your own politics?

I think it’s a way of critiquing any power structure that we’ve ever known by nature of being exploitative, which the Culture isn’t. Cooperation works astoundingly and seems necessary for a good society, but I like the bracing feeling of swimming against the tide.

Does sci-fi need to make such parallels?

I think so. It’s quite an easy thing to do in a way, because you can completely redesign any given society specifically to point up any message you want to get across. It feels natural to talk about that scale of things and use science fiction to achieve it.

One of the essential elements of the Culture strikes me as being the near-infinite abundance of everything imaginable to its citizens. To what extent is this the key to its structure and ethics?

I think it’s one of them. You don’t really have the excuse of saying, “there’s nothing to go round so we’re gonna fight for it”. But that’s not really the end of it. It’s a necessary but not sufficient condition. The influence of the Minds is very important - these profoundly rational and deeply intelligent beings playing the part of benign gods.

I don’t think today’s human beings have any chance of creating anything like the Culture. We’re too unkind to be pleasant to each other. I think we’d probably need to modify ourselves. We’re just too inherently vicious. Maybe there’s a genetic code for things like racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, which all boil down to the fear of others. If we could eradicate that gene then maybe we could start to have something like the Culture. Maybe.

Of all the aliens you have created over the years, do you have a favourite species?

Probably the Dwellers [from The Algebraist]. I liked them from the start but I’m not sure why. They’re nice in quite a horrible way.

Can you see an end to the Culture series?

I can’t honestly see any necessary end in sight, but who knows. I enjoy writing about the Culture so much that I can envisage it going on for at least half a dozen more novels. Eventually I’ll have to stop writing them, but there won’t be a dramatic end. I’m determined not to write one, in fact. There’s so much temptation when you have so much control over a storyline in science fiction.

But I think a central point about the Culture is that it’s here to stay. It wants to continue its good works and inspire other civilisations to become like it, take on some of its flavours.

Are the rumours of a potential Culture film adaptation true?

Yes. It’s one of my short stories called A Gift from the Culture but, as they say in Hollywood, don’t hold your breath. I haven’t seen a script or anything yet.

Would you resist the idea of one of the longer books being brought to the big screen?

No, I’d really like them to do Consider Phelbas first. They would have to chop bits out, but I think it would work as a film. Eventually you lose control but on the other hand more people get to see your ideas. You’d hope the positives outweigh the negatives.

Would you have to advise them on how to pronounce your characters’ names?

I already do, and I’m trying to convince them how the spaceships look, because I know they’ll look wrong. I’m sufficiently nerd-like to have drawings of my spaceships. They look like shoeboxes with the edges rounded off, although I haven’t drawn a new ship for about three decades.

You are fairly vocal about your political opinions - how do you feel about the coalition government?

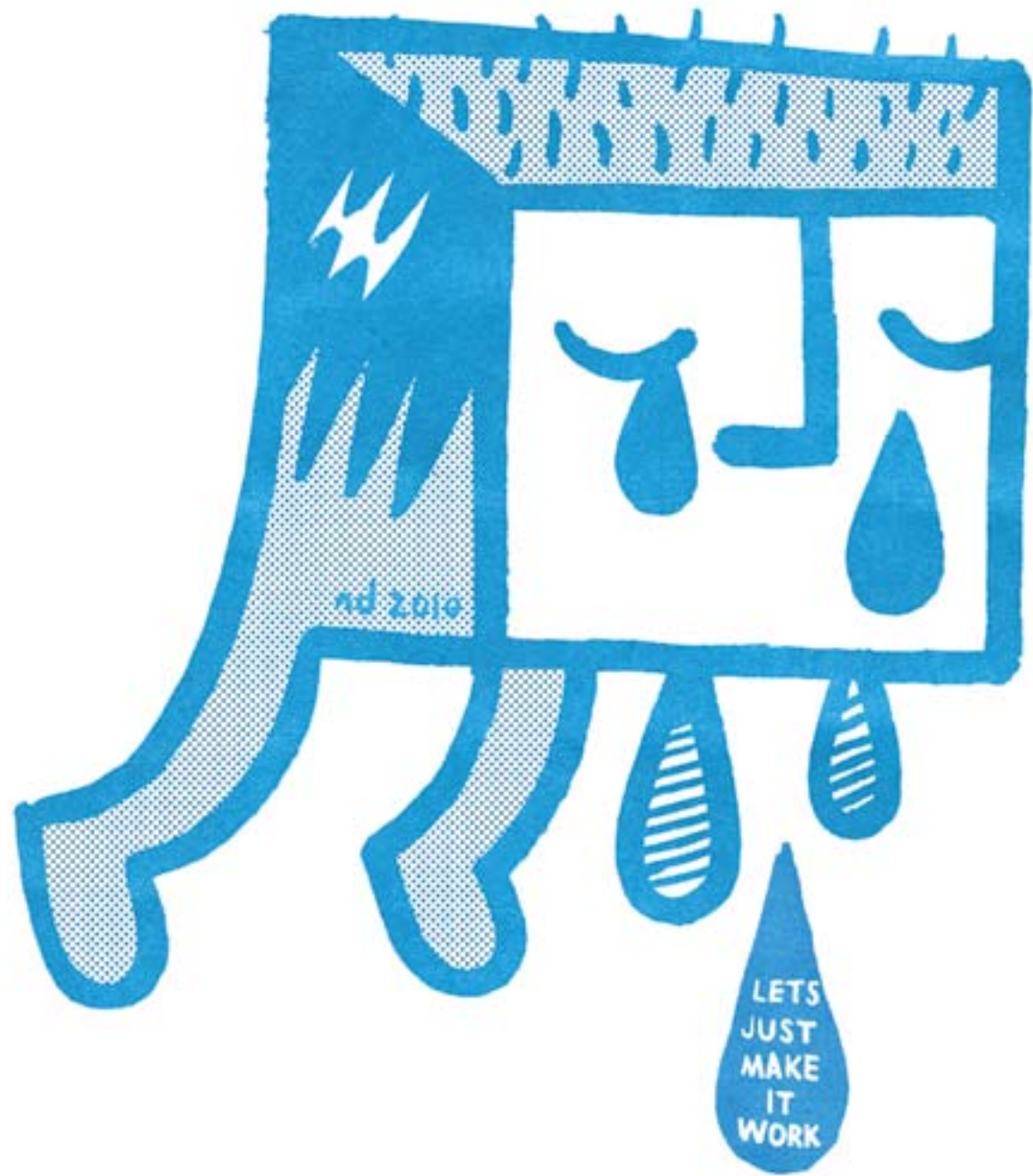
I think it’s catastrophically awful. The last election basically had three Tory parties to vote for and now the shit is going to hit the fan. This idea that all these cuts are necessary is just bollocks, a political lie, a societal suicide. These Tories - we knew they were bastards but we didn’t know they were fucking idiots. As for the liberals - a lot of people voted for them specifically to keep the Tories out and now they find them to be cooperating. I think they have made a profound strategic mistake. They’ve not only shot themselves in the foot, but they’ve put the foot into their mouths and then done it.

How do you define independence?

As a politically-engaged Scot, this term has a different kind of meaning. Scottish independence is something I’ve come round to. Not a romantically held belief, but one formed because the SNP have had the most left wing manifesto in the last few elections. I now feel that Scotland could make a go of independence within Europe. Some English people seem to hate Europe so much you just want to turn around and say, “well get out then”.

What’s next for Iain (M) Banks?

Next is a new mainstream novel, which I’m starting to write (if things go to plan) on the 3rd of January. It’s awfully close to the time when the Hogmanay celebrations will have just ended, so I might be pushing time from my hangover. It will probably have some aspects of a thriller, set in Scotland and featuring feuding families again.



Media Lens is a UK-based media-watch project, which offers authoritative criticism of mainstream media bias and censorship, as well as providing in-depth analysis, quotes, media contact details and other resources.

Our aim is to encourage the general population to challenge media managers, editors and journalists who set news agendas that traditionally reflect establishment and elite interests.

We hope to raise public awareness of the underlying systemic failings of the corporate media to report the world around us honestly, fairly and accurately.

Fundamentally, we wish to reduce suffering wherever it occurs.

DEATHLY SILENCE, OBAMA'S LETTER, NETANYAHU'S REJECTION AND THE MEDIA'S NON-RESPONSE.

Following Israel's capture of the West Bank in 1967, along with other territories including East Jerusalem, Israel has built and expanded Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land. The settlers enjoy the benefits of a separate, and far superior, civilian infrastructure to nearby Palestinian communities, and they are protected at great expense by the Israeli military. Under international law, the settlements are illegal. But despite private agreements with the US to rein in growth, Israel has continued the non-stop expansion of its illegal settlements. While the public stance of the United States is that it does not recognise "the international legitimacy" of the settlements, Washington has in practice provided decades-long support for Israeli policy.

Earlier this week, independent journalist Jonathan Cook reported facts that blow a hole through the standard deceit that the United States is an "honest broker" for peace in the Middle East (1). As Cook explains, details were leaked of a letter sent by US President Barack Obama to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister: "Obama made a series of extraordinarily generous offers to Israel, many of them at the expense of the Palestinians, in return for a single minor concession from Netanyahu: a two-month extension of the partial freeze on settlement growth."

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The previous 10-month freeze on settlement growth in the West Bank, which has just ended, has not so far been renewed by Israel. This obduracy threatens to bring the negotiations to an abrupt halt. This was the deadlock that Obama's letter was supposedly designed to break. Netanyahu reportedly declined the US offer, while Washington denies that a letter was ever sent. But according to the Israeli media, US officials in Washington are "incensed" by Netanyahu's rejection.

As Cook notes, the disclosures were made by an informed source: David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a close associate of Dennis Ross, Obama's chief adviser on the Middle East, who is said to have initiated the offer. Cook continues: "In return for a two-month extension of the settlement moratorium, the US promised to veto any UN Security Council proposal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the next year, and committed to not seek any further extensions of the freeze. The future of the settlements would be addressed only in a final agreement. The US would also allow Israel to keep a military presence in the West Bank's Jordan Valley, even after the creation of a Palestinian state; continue controlling the borders of the Palestinian territories to prevent smuggling; provide Israel with enhanced weapons systems, security guarantees and increase its billions of dollars in annual aid; and create a regional security pact against Iran."

The Palestinian leadership, observes Cook, is certain to draw three major conclusions "from this attempt at deal-making over its head."

"The first is that the US president, much like his predecessors, is in no position to act as an honest broker. His interests in the negotiations largely coincide with Israel's. Obama needs a short renewal of the freeze, and the semblance of continuing Israeli and Palestinian participation in the 'peace process', until the US Congressional elections in November. The second conclusion - already strongly suspected by Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, and his advisers - is that Netanyahu, despite his professed desire to establish a Palestinian state, is being insincere."

Finally: "The third conclusion for the Palestinians is that no possible combination of governing parties in Israel is capable of signing an agreement with Abbas that will not entail significant compromises on the territorial integrity of a Palestinian state."

There was next to no coverage of these dramatic revelations and their implications in the UK news media. As far as we can determine, the Independent has remained silent, along with The Times and the bulk of the national press.

One welcome, although brief, exception appeared last week on the Guardian website by its Jerusalem-based correspondent Harriet Sherwood (2). Oddly this did not appear in the print edition, as far as we can determine from searches of the Lexis-Nexis newspaper database.

A fleeting mention did, however, appear in the Guardian on 4th October (and the following day in the paper). Stretching his journalistic muscle to all of 40 words, Guardian assistant editor Simon Tisdall wrote blandly in his "world briefing": "Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, is likewise refusing to budge. He reportedly told US officials that a 60-day extension to the building moratorium that expired last month, as sought by Obama, would damage his political credibility and endanger his coalition." (3)

Note the conformity to the requirements of professional journalism to report facts, but only superficially and without the context and analysis that might offend power.

As far as we can see, the only other national UK newspaper to mention the latest disclosures was the Daily Telegraph, which had a printed piece titled inoffensively - indeed, deceptively - 'Obama tries to keep peace deal on track'. The earlier online version was more honest: 'Barack Obama "sent Israel letter outlining assurances on peace talks"' (4).

As for the BBC, the search function on its news website is notoriously

cumbersome to use; so it has been difficult to verify whether BBC news online has reported it at all. But an email from Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen (see below) strongly suggests the corporation has yet to mention the disclosures about Obama's letter, Netanyahu's rejection of it, and what these latest developments might mean for a proper understanding of the Middle East "peace process".

On 4th October, we wrote to Jeremy Bowen, asking whether he was aware of Obama's letter and Netanyahu's rejection of it. We also referred to Cook's report, highlighting the main conclusions that could be drawn, as we saw above: namely, that the US is no "honest broker"; the timing of Obama's letter with forthcoming US Congressional elections is unlikely to be a coincidence; and that Netanyahu, and indeed the Israeli leadership as a whole, is not a sincere negotiating partner. We concluded in our email to Bowen: "Were you aware of these disclosures? And do you plan to report them, and their significance?"

On 5th October, Bowen emailed back: "Yes, I am aware of the American proposals, which have been reported extensively since David Makovsky put them in the Washington Institute for Near East Policy site. I am in Lebanon working on a radio programme at the moment. I feel sure that the American offer will be part of my reporting when I am back with the Israelis and Palestinians."

We replied the following day: "It is noteworthy that the BBC has seemingly failed to report on President Obama's letter, especially given the extensive resources at your disposal. Obama's self-serving offer to the Israelis, and Netanyahu's rejection of it, is significant for many reasons, as reporter Jonathan Cook makes clear in his piece. The role of the US as 'honest broker', and the cynical realpolitik of the timing with US Congressional elections in November, are laid bare; as is Netanyahu's obstructionism and insincerity. The story is all over the Israeli media.

"There were thus compelling reasons for the BBC to bring these disclosures in a timely and fully explanatory way to the attention of the public. That the BBC's Middle East bureau is seemingly unable or unwilling to do so, regardless of whether you happen to be in Lebanon working on a radio programme, is grim news indeed. By denying the public vital facts that enable us to form a fully-rounded picture of what's going on, you have surely neglected your professional responsibilities. This matters because ultimately people's lives depend upon the truth being reported."

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Birthday [Part 1]

Theophilus London [LIVE]
+ **The Count & Sinden**

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The Tuesday Club
Birthday [Part 2]

Sub Focus [LIVE]
+ **Bassnectar** [LIVE]

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The Tuesday Club
Birthday [Part 3]

Jagga [LIVE]
+ **Rusko**

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Ocean [LIVE]

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JON MCGREGOR.

Interview by Joe Kriss.

Jon McGregor is the author of the critically acclaimed *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* and *So Many Ways To Begin*. He is the winner of the Betty Trask Prize and the Somerset Maugham Award, and has twice been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He was born in Bermuda in 1976, but grew up in Norfolk and now lives in Nottingham. Even the Dogs is his third novel. Now Then caught up with him after his recent appearance at Off The Shelf Literature Festival.

You’ve just read at the Rude Shipyard. Have you got any other links to Sheffield?

I came to Sheffield straight after university in Bradford, lived in Netherthorpe for a year and worked at the Blackwells bookshop on Mappin Street for two months. That was the year I was first really trying to have a go at writing. I was really focused on just working enough to buy me time to write. When I was living in Netherthrope and they were redeveloping all the flats there, they were empty for ages. They had been gutted - all the electrics, all the doors - and there was this weird, almost plague-like atmosphere living in somewhere completely empty. That description ended up in *Even the Dogs*.

The strongest elements of your style are those poetic descriptive pieces, but you’ve always said you don’t write poetry. How would you define your style?

Poetry is hard to define, but for me there’s a big gap between heightened prose and poetry. Obviously there’s a broad range of thought about this, but poetry has a whole set of formalities and structures. The poetry I’m interested in is shape and form and that’s a long way from what I do in prose.

One of the common threads throughout your novels is adopting different writing voices and styles. Was this to experiment with ways of telling a story?

One of my main things was that everyday things were worth considering. It seems obvious to me to use heightened language to portray them, the cinema equivalent of lighting them in a certain way. I guess that is why, when I came to write the second book, it was lacking some of the poetic language, but that was deliberate as it was about relationships and lives and felt like a quieter novel.

I always thought I’ve written very different books, but other people keep pointing out similarities. A few books down the line, I’ll be left only with those elements and that’ll be the finished article, the one that works best. I’m definitely keen not to be rewriting the same story and style. I want to try and find a form to fit the story I’m telling and experiment.

In a way short stories are more important to me than novels. There’s nowhere to hide. It’s easier to study a short story - read it a few times and you can work out exactly how it works.

NOT WAVING BUT FROWNING.

I often think I could tell the story of my marriage. It would be a short story. But I’d like to write it down, for the record. We met, we got married, we had kids, he went to sea, end of. I used to go down to the harbour to wave them off, on my own at first and then later with the girls in tow. They’re superstitious these trawler men. And off they’d sail for months on end and I’d be marooned on dry land, and not waving so much as frowning.

In those nights the shipping forecast kept me company: it and the kids. The names worked like a lullaby. Faroes, Fair Isle, Viking, North Utsire, South Utsire, Forties, Fisher. One night I’d just drifted off when the coastguard called. The trawler had been hit by a wave the size of a two-storey barn. They had managed to send out a distress call but then the transmission stopped. There was a force nine and they didn’t expect to find any survivors. The next day the RAF couldn’t find them either. Not even a life raft. But I found something in the back of the box file where we kept the legal stuff. The trawler insurance had run out two months previously. Then I checked the holdall under the bed. £25K in twenties. I got the kids together and we spent that week packing and the next months waiting for the official announcements. It came in a letter from Grampian Police in Aberdeen. I had put the cottage up for sale immediately and stalled the buyers who mostly got fed up and quit with the delays. But then it all came together with a cash sale. When the phone rang, six months to the day after the sinking and on the eve of our wedding anniversary, it was the international operator, asking if I’d take a reverse charges phone call from Trondheim.

‘Hello, pet. You ok, the kids?’

I ripped the phone out of the wall and piled everything into the van and we headed south. We were on the outskirts of Edinburgh when the youngest asked where we were going. Good question. I passed the road atlas to her big sister and told her to open a page at random.

‘Where’s Sheffield?’ she said.

We spent the first night in a Travelodge outside Rotherham on the hard shoulder of the M1. It was late and we were all too tired to sleep. I put the radio on out of habit. It was the shipping forecast.

Dogger Bank. Is that where the trawler went down they asked? Yes, I told them. Is dad coming back, they asked? No, I told them. He’s not coming back.

We got a place in Woodseats. It was hard at first, what with the new school and their accents and not knowing anyone, but whenever it got too much I’d spread the map out on the kitchen table.

Look, I’d say. Look at that. Sheffield. You can’t get much further from the sea. That always did the trick.

For ages the noise drove me crazy but eventually I got used to it and now I really enjoy the rumble of the trucks and the early morning traffic noise. It helps me feel connected to the city in a way I never really felt attached to the land and the sea. The kids are doing well at school and the neighbours have been good. The area’s ok and I meet other parents at the school meetings and I got a part time admin job with a local charity.

Old friends will get in touch now and then. They only have an email contact. They ask how we are. I won’t tell them where. They ask about the kids. They ask about the weather. I tell them rough or very rough, occasional rain. Good, occasionally poor.

AL MCCLIMENS.

15TH SEPTEMBER

EARLY MORNING, WALKLEY.

Walking past midnight on a Tuesday, my feet glide over swathes of smooth and lamp-post lined

asphalt, crossing Springvale and Upperthorpe, passing the old Rasta who goes swimming

in the university pool. A drivers’ face in a window shouts ‘weirdo!’ I wonder

was he shouting at Rasta or me? Outside my house I urinate on the front lawn

looking out over the city lights: Norton, Manor top, Don Valley, Rotherham, Lincolnshire.

Somewhere in the deep a single hammer slowly repeats a regular beat.

Red dots glow over the horizon. I squint my eyes, count them:

three in a row.

MARK DOYLE.





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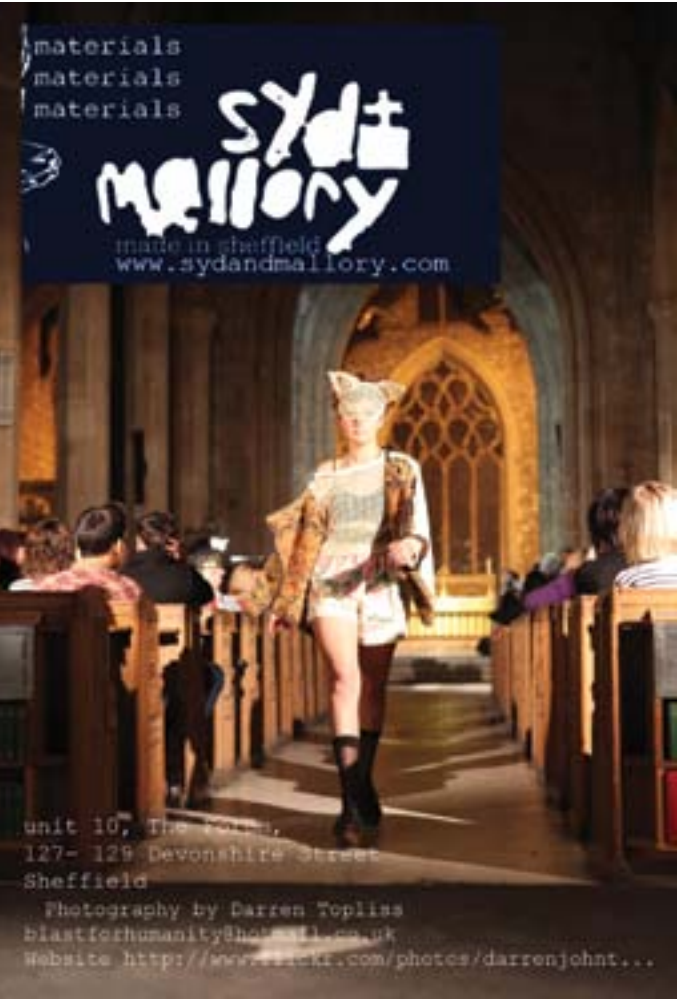
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NICK DEAKIN.

STUDIES IN SIMPLE.

INTERVIEW BY JONES.

BASICS, PLEASE. WHAT STARTED YOU DRAWING?

I've always drawn, and lego doesn't scan that well.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INSPIRATION FROM?

Sex language music death love hate deprivation elation hope internet.

TOOLS. WHAT DO YOU USE REGULARLY AND WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE?

Black fine line bullet tip posca. Scanner. Mac. Mac is fave. Since Photoshop 4 I've held it close.

WHAT OTHER ARTISTIC MEDIA HAVE HAD AN EFFECT ON YOUR ART?

The photocopier.

HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR DAYS?

In the studio drinking coffee, playing loud music, eating sandwiches, making funnies, drawing stuff.

WHICH OF YOUR RECENT PIECES HAVE YOU ENJOYED MAKING THE MOST?

I made a pie a while ago that was something to behold. Meat and potato. The archetypal pie, apparently? Not my favorite. Let's not confuse the issue, it's steak and kidney. I wanted to start with the basics. I possibly put too much focus on getting the pastry right though because lord knows I love pastry. So that was key, and sweet flakey tits did I succeed. But I put all my eggs in one pastry, or basket, and didn't give as much love and understanding to the potatoes. My parboiling was below par, and as a result the spud content was a little too al dente, a tad too firm under the gentle push of my teeth. Spoilt the whole thing. Indigestion, heartburn. Never has a pie that looked so good meant so little. It would have served six people heartily, big cumbersome slices spilling filling and hung thick with gravy. I had cat whimsy curled at my feet and I dreamt of days through a milky curtain, where grandkids would wax and beam smiles to my house with thoughts of grandpa's famous pies.

And I fucked it up.

Somewhere along the way though, there was a huge surge of hope, surfing goofy on the pie's intoxicating scent as the oven glowed.

HOW HAS YOUR ART EVOLVED OVER TIME?

It has become simpler. I'm shedding what I don't need. I'm working towards a blank piece of paper.

HOW HAS ART IN GENERAL CHANGED SINCE YOU STARTED?

The amount of talent out there now is stunning, or I am just more aware of it.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

Tees for the American Red Cross. A type poster for an exhibit in The Hague, and various type and character items for an ongoing branding project with Ledgard Jepson.

ANY TIPS ON HOW TO SURVIVE MAKING MONEY FROM YOUR ART? DO YOU FIND IT IMPORTANT?

Yes, it is important to survive. If you can do it by making art then cherish that. If you can do it making art you like then smile like a chuffed beetle and roll that dung home.

WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE IN ART?

Limp-wristed jizz-on-a-stick bollocks.

WHAT MAKES YOU SMILE IN ART?

Bus stop knobs.

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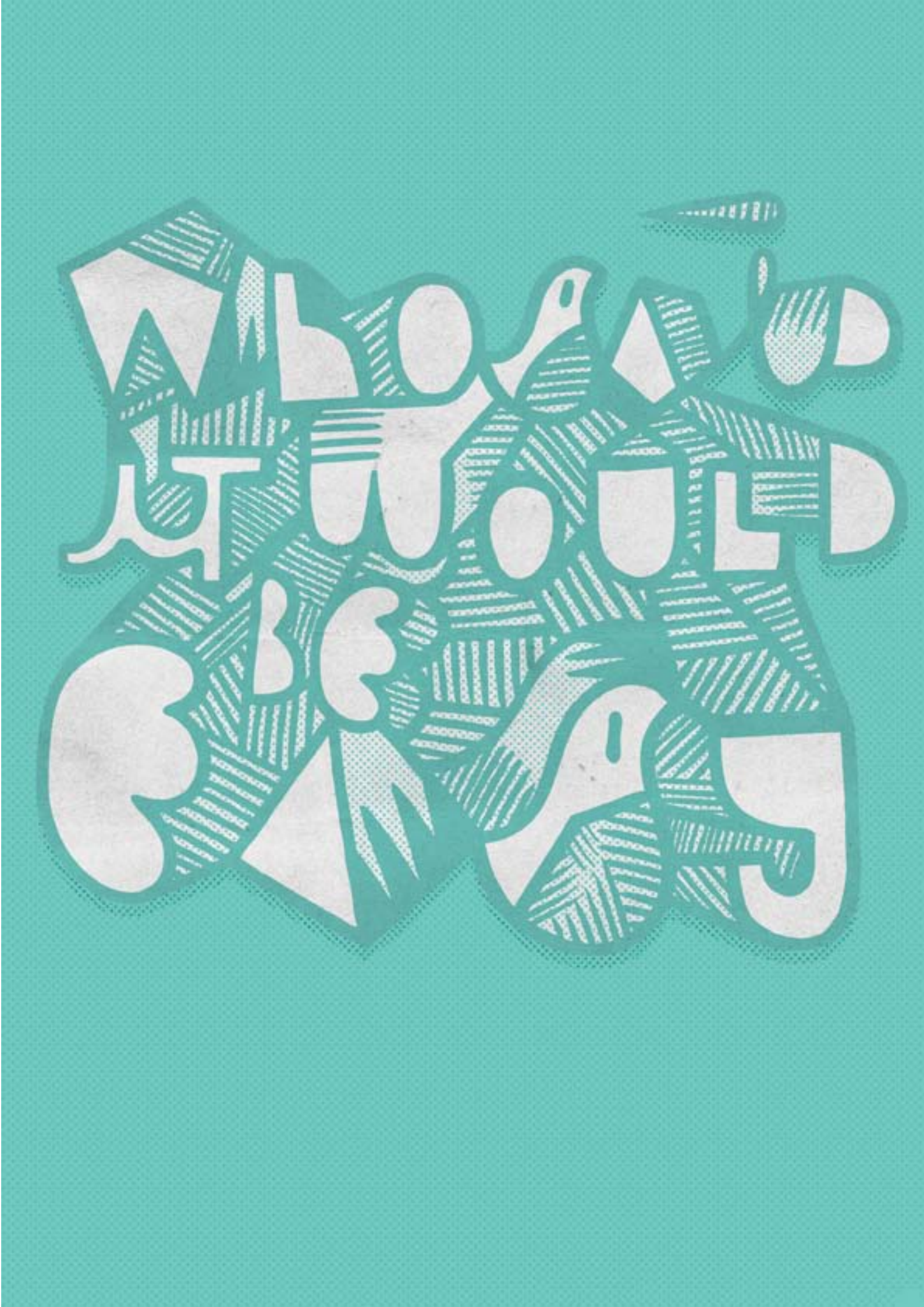
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BIGNESS.

A RANT OF LIMITED DIRECTION ON TRENDS IN MUSIC.

BEN DOREY.

Imagine yourself 60 years ago, in an age of immense flux in music, with Jazz rising in popularity and challenging the conventions of establishment music, and recorded music in its infancy - gramophone records pressed from takes of live concerts. It must have been pretty mindblowing to see virtuoso players eschew the score (if there even was one) and improvise complex parts off the top of their heads. A generation later and rock musicians had taken on the musical ideas from blues and jazz and were amplifying their efforts to huge crowds whilst strutting around in tight leather trousers. Nice.

There is a rich tapestry of brilliant music stemming from these threads of change, but underlying all of this is the elevation of the musician to something at least as important as the music itself. This was mirrored in turn by the classical world, with the emergence of global superstars whose interpretations of famous works became increasingly ornamented and distanced from the originals as they performed them hundreds of times over, trying to retain some vague interest for themselves. Although, as a musician and avid fan of live music, I would never wish an end to the intensity of the one-off performance, a fallacy of 'live is best' has emerged, a statement officially supported by huge organisations such as The American Federation of Musicians. This pays no homage to the incredible advances in recording technology, which run parallel to the growth in popularity of live music and are instrumental to its success.

A little-known figure in music history who challenged this fallacy is Glenn Gould, a man I have a lot of respect for. Gould was one of the leading concert pianists of his era, performing with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra from the age of sixteen and touring extensively throughout the Americas, Europe and the Soviet Union. But in 1964 he abruptly withdrew from public performance. His reason was the possibility of the studio to create music of a standard beyond his own (very high) ones. In an entirely selfless gesture, he distanced himself, his ego and the accompanying deficiencies from a final product which he saw as doing more justice to the actual substance of the music. By splicing the best bits of various takes together and modifying elements post performance, he entered into a tradition that has since led to the studio becoming the most important instrument in music.

By the mid-Seventies, the music world had entered into a weird transitional period. The fallacy 'live music is the best' still dominated people's conscious opinions, but the reality of the industry was that the studio had already taken over. Despite more obvious examples of studio work existing - think King Tubby, Scratch Perry and Brian Eno for starters - rock music dominated. Yet the level of post production on all the biggest records was enormous, with bands spending months in the studio to produce a 50-minute LP. When people went to see bands they increasingly yearned for onstage reproductions of their favourite records, a trend which still exists in rock music today. When you go to a gig the biggest cheers nearly always come when a band plays the opening recognisable licks of their most successful record, and disappointment is often tangible when they announce that they're playing an unreleased track. There are few popular bands in the modern age who launch into 15-minute improvisations onstage and get a good reaction.

Electronic music is the privileged child of the studio revolution, because most of the time there is no pretension that live is better. Advances in technology have opened up almost limitless musical possibilities to those prepared to put the hours in at the studio to realise their ideas. The most commonly accepted way of listening to such music in a public setting is via a DJ playing recordings, something which would be considered cheating by my parents' generation but is now accepted as a valid way of listening. We have thankfully moved beyond the age where we need to have a visual, onstage indicator of where the music is coming from to consider it valid. Yet ego has entered into the world of electronic music in a most distasteful way, with the studio being abused to create tunes which sound 'big'. It is a great shame that, in most UK clubs I go to, people are judging the worth of songs by how much they shake the place. Don't get me wrong, it takes a lot of skill to create epically large sounds, just as it takes a wind player skill to play loudly without squeaking. But would you want to see said wind player play that loudly, unremittingly or rather have them express the full dynamism of music? With the age of the studio we should be able to refine more than ever music's capacity to seduce through all the available modes possible. Listen to Stephan Bodzin's 'Bremen Ost' (just type it in to youtube). It is like being wine'd and dined by music - varied, interesting, at times massive, but importantly not ALL of the time. In fact, there are points where what's audible is little more than an electronic whimper. Fantastic. Now listen to any track by Rusko. It is the musical equivalent of having an old fat guy stick his tongue out and wave his knob in your face repeatedly. I know which I prefer.

MOUNT KIMBIE.

8TH OCTOBER.
BUNGALOWS AND BEARS.

REVIEWER – IMOGEN DECORDOVA

Complaining about the lack of bass, Mount Kimbie obviously don't feel suited to the venue, a fair evaluation as the duo are more familiar with 2am slots and soundsystems that convey every intricate detail of their beautifully constructed tunes. Theirs is the sort of music that is supposed to envelope you and come at you from every angle, something which unfortunately Bungalows and Bears wasn't quite adept at providing.

Debut album **Crooks and Lovers** was released this summer and received a huge amount of hype and praise from hipster bibles and red top tabloids alike, which isn't so surprising seeing as their subtle blend of muffled hip hop beats and ambient sounds is nothing but likeable. The Kimbie Krew produce a noise that has been termed 'post dubstep' in the fickle world of musical trends, which if the post rock tag is anything to go by is a term that will be lazily thrown around for the next twenty years.

There are a couple of bangers amongst some fillers and a few bum notes throughout the set. 'Carbonated' and 'Before I Move Off' both prove smooth yet simultaneously frantic tunes that showcase the glitchy, off-and-on vocals made popular by the musical styles these guys take influence from. Additional live drums, drum pad and guitar plump up the sound and keep those who could actually see the duo visually occupied if the sound alone didn't quite prove enough.

Crystal clear vocals provided by both Maker and Campos on 'William' were met with blank stares, as they remain mostly muted and indecipherable on their first EP and much time was spent debating whether they were an odd addition or homage to the garage inflected roots of dubstep. Either way, they didn't go down particularly well. I'm not sure it would be fair to lay the blame on the Bung Bear sound, but the vocals were a bit too Audiobullys-ish and distracted from the backing beats.

It gradually starts to get a bit more claustrophobic at the front and a sweaty fidget dance makes its way across the floor as the duo's last song is announced with another apology for the "terrible, terrible sound".

Get hold of their back catalogue and lock yourself in a small dark room with as much bass as possible. That should do the trick.

DUM DUM GIRLS.

21ST SEPTEMBER.
QUEENS SOCIAL CLUB.

REVIEWER – TOM ROPER.

Backed by the sparkling silver curtains of the perfectly run-down Queens Social Club, the Dum Dum Girls, all black lace, red lips and laddered tights, look like an otherworldly group of gothic goddesses possessed by the power of attitude. It could be said that they have "a look".

Kicking off with a drowsy but powerful cover of the Rolling Stones' 'Play with Fire', the band propel the sadness and danger captured in the original version with crescendo harmonies so cold, I'm expecting some dry ice to roll past their ankles. 'Hey Sis' and 'Catholicked' both follow, infused with a Spector-esque hiss and echo that is complemented by the impressive vocal range and sweetly sung pitch perfect harmonies. Dee Dee's ice cold attitude is constant throughout, rarely making eye contact with the crowd, instead focusing above the awe-struck audience, occasionally shaking her hips or bobbing her head from side to side. Buried under a thick layer of distortion and fuzz, the songs still manage to shine through like the sun braking through clouds. The infectious 'Bhang Bhang' creates some movement in the crowd with its impatient energy, but the majority are either too cool or too in awe of the majestic Dum Dum Girls to give the show the physical response it deserves. The lush and haunting texture of 'Baby Don't Go' fills the room and slows the pace back down to a mesmerising saunter, giving the band another chance to show off their vocal talent. 'Jail La La' receives the best reaction of the night and is swiftly followed by 'It Only Takes One Night' before the group return for an encore of 'Rest of Our Lives' and the infectious 'Everybody's Out', reinforcing the fact that they are so much cooler than you with the line "My baby's better than you" sung over and over.

The Shangri-Las of the Facebook generation produce an astounding and mesmerising live show that seems to resonate and infect more powerfully than their recordings.

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY / KING CAPISCE.

15TH OCTOBER.
PLUG.

REVIEWER - SAM WALBY.

King Capisce have probably featured in half of the Now Then issues published in the last year, so I'll keep this short. Although a slightly ill-fitting support act, the Sheffield five-piece do an admirable job of warming up the crowd with their breed of melodic, riffastic post rock, and even treat us to a couple of new ones, which lean towards a more upbeat, optimistic tone and are supported (as ever) by impressive technical skill.

Lee 'Scratch' Perry (or Rainford Hugh Perry, as he is known to his mates) was a key figure in reggae, dub and ska throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s, perhaps best known for his position as head of the Upsetters. Even if you've never heard of him, you have probably heard something he had a hand in creating – he co-wrote Junior Murvin's 'Police and Thieves', for example, and his own tunes have been seized upon by many an advertising campaign in the last couple of years.

At the ripe old age of 74, Perry is surprisingly agile on stage and appears adorned with a ludicrous arrangement of jewellery, tassels and other dangly stuff. His band is incredibly tight and play to his every word, fitting in around him and rewinding when he says so. A combination of drums, bass, guitar and keyboard is unlikely to break new ground in a genre like this – indeed, sometimes the musical backdrop comes close to being boring – but the band do their job admirably and sound pristine through the Plug soundsystem.

Separate the man from the myth, however, and what's left is a frontman who has all of the verve and passion, but none of the musical awareness or vocal capability. Perry proves frustratingly unable to hold the right notes, consistently singing flat and generally sounding a bit like a drunken version of his more youthful self. The songs are deep and well delivered, but all too often the backing singer has to purposefully hit bum notes to harmonise with Scratch. The killing blow is that the band spend over ten minutes hyping the crowd before he steps out and a further five minutes before the encore saying, "Are you ready for...LEE....SCRATCH....PERRRRRAAAAAAY!" Such ego massaging makes it feel like an ironic school disco.

One last criticism, because I'm not in the habit of picking on old men more than is absolutely necessary – why play so many Bob Marley dubs when you are widely considered a pioneer of the genre and have hundreds of your own tunes?

DEAD SONS / WET NUNS.

24TH SEPTEMBER.
MONTGOMERY THEATRE.

REVIEWER – JAMES LOCK.

It was a pleasure to head down to see the Dead Sons and Wet Nuns show at the Montgomery Theatre. Although not often used as a music venue, the theatre sounded perfect for the characters performing tonight. I received a good-looking Dead Sons promo CD on entry as well. Free stuff be praised.

First off, Sheffield two-piece Wet Nuns, who provide an amusing parody of two performers from the American Deep South. While entertaining, this ostentatiously serves another purpose – they can get away with awesomely loud, stripped-down electric blues guitar over a driving beat while grunting, shouting and talking in an unintelligible accent. Verdict: well worth it to see passion and performance in equal measure.

Dead Sons come on to a crowd keen for the main event and thankfully they do not disappoint. With all members playing more than one instrument and sharing vocal duties, the traditional front man centre-stage spot was almost redundant, allowing the captivated audience to see the whole band play its constituent parts in plain view. Particular note goes out to percussionists Mathew Byrne and Joseph Green, who played jaw-droppingly hard throughout. Standout track of the evening for me became 'The Hollers and the Hymns', full of beautiful melodrama and crescendo. Broadly speaking, think Grinderman meets raw Sheffield vocal, surrounded by an atmosphere of beating percussion, fairground organ and heavy guitar. Dead Sons play again at the Harley on the 12th November. Get down there.

myspace.com/deadsonsmusic

myspace.com/wetnunsdeathblues

DUTCH UNCLES.

18TH OCTOBER.
FORUM.

REVIEWER - BEN ECKERSLEY.

Manchester's Dutch Uncles played to a surprisingly busy Forum for a rainy Monday night. Exuding confidence from the start, it's clear that the attentions of the UK's indie institutions (NME, Lamacq et al) have helped them on their way. I first came across them after hearing about them at Sounds From The Other City, Salford's brilliant alternative to the rather overhyped In The City Festival, and their debut album showed a great deal of promise.

Their inspiration list includes such diverse names as King Crimson and Steve Reich, and I was gratified to hear on record a band that seemed to unite the clever rhythms and angular melodies of (say) Battles with a pop sensibility and a real range of sounds and textures. However, this diversity didn't come across nearly so well live. They are a band with a seemingly endless ability to come up with catchy and memorable riffs, and really it's this that saves them from trendy indie drudgery more than anything else. A better comparison for their live show would be something like Graceland-era Paul Simon filtered through the Futureheads. Stand out new track 'Cadenza' sounded like 90s house, but it wasn't until final song 'Twelfth' that I heard the band I was hoping to hear. I genuinely believe they are capable of uniting experimental and popular music in a fresh way, but this gig – with so many brilliant album tracks left unplayed and so many risks not taken – left me a little underwhelmed.





LETHERETTE.

LETHERETTE EP.
HO_TEP.

REVIEWER – JACK SCOURFIELD.

Having already gifted the world artists such as Floating Points, Fatima and FunkinEven through his Eglo imprint, Rinse FM’s experimental master Alexander Nut has now launched an off-shoot label, Ho Tep, which sprang in to action in July with Throwing Snow’s **Un Vingt / Cronos 12**”. Any regular listeners to his Mixed Nuts show on Rinse will know that this is a man with some seriously good music taste, so it comes as no surprise that Letherette’s self-titled debut EP is, well, seriously good.

The Wolverhampton-based duo have displayed promising outings before, with stellar remixes for Bibio and Solar Bears and an inclusion on one of Gilles Peterson’s Brownswood compilations for their track ‘Blad’, all generating murmurs of approval in the depths of the musical underground. This eight track EP will amplify those murmurs ten-fold, as Letherette have created a record that demonstrates great depth in both production and musical diversity. Opening tracks ‘Ashtro’ and ‘Dance Brace’ are glistening pearls of instrumental hip-hop that wouldn’t look out of place in the back catalogues of Messrs Dilla or Lotus, with each track containing just the right balance of shimmering melodies and thudding bass to soothe and excite. ‘Eye to Eye’ takes things even deeper, with a female vocal sample and snatches of tinkling piano layered on top of a steady beat to form a wonderfully soulful track. Fourth track ‘Furth & Myre’ is yet another departure, with Letherette turning their hand to boogie by chopping up a disco tune and pasting it back together in the form of a wonky collage of funk. If you’re struggling to picture what a wonky collage of funk may look like, just imagine the resulting artwork if you instructed your four year-old child to cut up photos of James Brown and George Clinton feasting on some particularly pungent cheese (such photos may not actually exist), and then stick them back together, but with jam instead of glue.

Just over half way through the EP is when Letherette have chosen to drop their masterpiece. A sublime lesson in how to take the right sample and mesh it with a crisp melody and a quality beat, fifth track ‘In July Focus’ is quite honestly one of the best tracks I’ve heard all year. The vocals have been exquisitely spliced up so that they take on a whole life and soul of their own, then proceed to playfully flit over the backing beats with a feel of almost orgasmic ecstasy. The only thing wrong with this track is that it doesn’t last for ten thousand years – two minutes and twenty-three seconds is tantalisingly too short for such a beautiful sound.

The next track ‘Cherryade’ is as light and effervescent as its name suggests, but still retains the element of soulfulness that’s present throughout the rest of the record. ‘Say Yeah’ is a sub-sixty seconds burst of pent-up beat energy, before the EP closes with ‘The Way’, a slightly murkier cut but nonetheless still full of the rhapsodic pulse that runs throughout the entire record. Letherette’s is an EP that will delight with its array of gems and is hopefully a sign of further great things to come.



oOoOO.

OOOOO.
TRI ANGLE RECORDS.

REVIEWER – GORDON BARKER.

While the surface of the world is speeding up, gathering pace with every JLS and X Factor product, the white-hot core is slowing. “Witch” or “drag” house is a very new sub-genre, and is one which is quite difficult to pinpoint or understand in its infancy. With a few artists in the forefront, each taking different approaches, they utilise massively transformed vocals, disfigured beats and virtually halted tempos to create a cavernous, sometimes heart-warming, yet always sinister atmosphere. Most end up sounding like the soundtrack to an unreleased John Carpenter film or someone playing your favourite 80s pop hit at 12rpm.

The second release from Brooklyn-based Tri Angle Records - the first being the fuzzy dirge pop epic from Balam Acab - is the self-titled debut from San Francisco’s oOoOO. The first notable thing about this EP is the harrowing artwork, providing a perfect back drop to the sounds to come - crooked arms, an unidentifiable woman in an old bedroom and a faded past. Old and apparently (as professed by oOoOO himself) cheap synthesizers and sequencers give a warm and nostalgic sound to the songs, but the added bonus is the distortion effect of them being pushed too far. In the truly epic ‘Burnout Eyess’ some layers are simply concealed behind bass and synth crackles.

Constantly paying tribute to a once enviable (but now long dead) pop scene, the tracks are arranged beautifully with sparsely loving lyrics and even delve into a cold R’n’B groove in ‘Hearts’. Chris Dexter - the pseudonym under which he conducts all interviews, press releases and even legal contracts relating to the project - says that he has more affinity to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera than his contemporaries and even his labelmates. Finding the dark side in modern pop, the EP plays out like an audio Blue Velvet, scratching at the surface to reveal the twisted and self-destructive underbelly of, in this case, the music industry.

With slow transitions and repetition being favourites, the entire record has a huge ability to slow and stretch time, sounding like a blurred recollection. Unfortunately its depth is probably its only downfall, a highly consuming and reflective work that certainly feels as if it ends all too soon. An LP should be something worth waiting for but, after this release, I hope it is sooner rather than later.

Witch/drag is a product of genuine interest in expanding the possibilities of already existing genres, refreshing them from the stasis a lot of them suffer from, and this is one of the first 12s off the new line. This scene should be watched with high anticipation.



BOZZWELL.

BITS & PIECES.
FIRM RECORDINGS

REVIEWER – SAM WALBY.

Bozzwell is widely considered to be a bit of a legend in these parts. He has been a Sheffield resident since the late 90s, when he hooked up with the All Seeing I to create ‘The Beat Goes On’. Trust me, you’d recognise it. He has also collaborated with the likes of Jarvis, Roots Manuva and Phil Oakey from the Human League.

As the name states, Bits & Pieces is made up of various Bozzwell productions released by Cologne-based label Firm in the late 2000s, on top of a few outtakes and unreleased sundries. Unsurprisingly, this makes for a mixed bag of tunes that encompass a range of styles, some of which hit the nail on the head better than others. While his approach leans heavily towards techno - which explains the unwavering support from Germany - there are other elements thrown into the mix as well.

‘I Get A Rush’ has a classic vibe to it, lent by a housey keyboard line and vocals inspired by early dance aesthetics. This is backed up by arpeggiated synth lines that are undeniably a little cheesy, but very consciously hark back to a time when the North was undergoing a real musical transformation.

‘Space Racer’ has a darker tone, underpinned by a bulging bassline, airy pads and whispered vocals. The tightness of the drum loops and the eerie melodies are what give this track a kind of boney charm. This may well be due to contributions from Aschka, a Canadian producer now based in Berlin who features. In a similar vein is ‘Fiona’s Song’, which rolls along with a dense collection of percussive samples and words about a young woman who “wants to live in Berlin and hang out with all those German girls”. The gloriously titled ‘Jarvis Called Me His Understudy’ drops the tempo while maintaining the same back to basics production ethos, albeit within a slightly more upbeat framework. Although I much prefer the instrumental elements of this album, the vocals are quite entertaining for their innate Britishness and deadpan delivery, which borders on spoken word.

Meanwhile, ‘Sheffield I Got It’ takes us away from the four-on-the-floor beat that defines most of Bits & Pieces towards a bouncier, dancehall-inspired rhythm with deep sub frequencies and big 80s synth pop chords.

Ultimately, the tracks already released by Firm (‘Marlena’s Eyes’, ‘Fiona’s Song’ and ‘Escape5’) are the best offerings here, but Bozz enthusiasts can undoubtedly find themselves something to salivate over.



MAGDA.

FROM THE FALLEN PAGE.
MINUS.

REVIEWER – BEN DOREY.

Magda is one of the leading figures in the heavily male dominated world of minimal techno. She started her career in the States as part of the Detroit scene, but moved to Berlin, the genre’s current spiritual home, at the same time as Richie Hawtin and has been integral to the output of the Minus label ever since. Her latest album, From The Fallen Page, continues to push the aesthetic she shares with her fellow emigre, combining the chilly cleanliness of the European sound with the haunting industrial overtones and dark atmospheres of Detroit’s minimal styles.

Opener ‘Get Down Goblin’ is one of the album’s strongest tracks and one which unifies the two aforementioned influences on Magda’s style most effectively. Starting with eerie ambient textures and discordant horror movie strings, it soon bleeds into a heaving interplay between these elements and tightly constructed percussion and glitch loops, before a three-note electro synth line takes the lead, creating a strange groove to the whole affair. All the while there are hazy whispers of Detroit in rhythm and in the bass, which sounds like a recording of a warehouse party from three blocks away. All pleasingly minimal, as you might expect.

In the next two tracks you do start to realise a problem though, and this is mainly caused by Magda trying too hard to establish a unifying trend throughout the album. This is something she has certainly achieved, but when I realised that although different enough, I could copy and paste the last paragraph to adequately describe the following two songs as well, it certainly became a problem. Minimal techno often draws criticism for recycling the same sounds and patterns over and over, but what is interesting here is that Magda has by and large escaped this. Instead she has created a new set of (needless to say) immaculately produced sounds from which she has crafted the album, but it is the same sounds that return again and again throughout.

I’m normally quite endeared by returning themes and motifs in albums, having grown up with a ludicrous obsession with prog rock and classical music, but Magda simply hasn’t quite nailed it here. The same ideas occur repeatedly without ever feeling as if they’re referencing another section of the music. Instead the tracks feel like a selection of projects all started from the same template on a computer with one sample pack on it. If this was indeed the case I would be very impressed, but as an acclaimed international artist I suspect Magda has access to rather more than this. There is nothing really wrong with any individual tracks on this album and if you are looking for a schooling in top level producing this is it, but as a whole body of work it just doesn’t sit together quite right. Maybe I just need to get over the annoyingly electro lead lines that form the body of every song...

POLAR BEAR HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE UK’S MOST ACCOMPLISHED JAZZ BANDS FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. COMBINING TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTATION WITH MORE OFF-THE-WALL ARRANGEMENTS EARNED THEM RESPECT EARLY ON, BUT IT WASN’T UNTIL THEY BEGAN INTRODUCING MORE ABSTRACT ELEMENTS THAT THEY GOT THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVED. THIS COINCIDED WITH THE ADDITION OF A NEW MEMBER, ONE LEAFCUTTER JOHN.

John has had solo releases on Planet Mu and Staubgold beginning in 2000, living in the strange world where electronic and acoustic collide. Since joining the band, he has become known for his ability to improvise with uncanny ‘instruments’ like balloons, making laptop trickery feel dangerous and uncharted over a backdrop of fresh, contemporary jazz.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH POLAR BEAR?

It was a few years back, before Polar Bear recorded **Held on the Tips of Fingers**. I was offered some free recording time in a studio in Chelsea by an engineer called Paul Richardson. I was finishing off my third album **The Housebound Spirit** at the time, so it must have been around 2002. I wanted to record some drums and Paul knew [Polar Bear drummer and lead man] Seb Rochford, so he got him to come in and record for the album. Later Seb gave me Polar Bear’s first album, but I didn’t really know what to make of it, having never heard any jazz before. Later he asked if I wanted to play on a few tracks and with some reservations I agreed, and ended up recording parts for Held on the Tips of Fingers and doing a few gigs with them. After this I became a full-time member of the group and the sound of the laptop became fully integrated into our sound.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE BAND?

I don’t have a set role in the band, but most of the time I feel like I’m part of the rhythm section. For the latest album I’m playing guitar as well as electronics, which has really changed the sound of the band.

YOU SAY YOU’VE NEVER REALLY LISTENED TO JAZZ – DID YOU START LISTENING TO IT FOR INSPIRATION OR IS YOUR ONLY EXPERIENCE OF THE GENRE THROUGH THE BAND?

In the early days we were mostly playing jazz clubs, so I heard loads of jazz that way. I didn’t do research or anything like that, but since that point I have worked with a fair amount of jazz musicians. It’s quite interesting because the language of the music is totally different to what I’m used to.

DID YOU FIND IT INTIMIDATING FITTING INTO A BAND WITH SUCH A TRADITIONAL SETUP?

I was worried and maybe slightly afraid because I didn’t know what it was all about. It was definitely a bit intimidating, but from the very first rehearsal I realised they were very open-minded people.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLAR BEAR TRACKS? IS IT DIFFERENT TO SOLO WORK?

I guess it is different, because when I work on my own I’m writing all the parts. When you’re in a band it’s a different approach, because you have to listen to other people much more. Seb will usually give an indication of what he wants. He writes parts out that I follow on the guitar.

DO YOU THINK JAZZ MIGHT CREEP INTO YOUR SOLO WORK?

It does influence me. Me and Seb travel together because we live near each other. I’ve passed my knowledge of editing and computer techniques to him and he’s passed compositional information to me. We’ll be discussing some piece of music in the car, and I’ll tell him about the technological side of it, while he’ll be talking about compound rhythm or something. You can’t play with a load of people without absorbing their music, but I don’t think my solo work will ever sound like jazz, because I don’t have that facility. It takes years and years to be able to play jazz well.

IT DOES HAVE A REPUTATION OF BEING A BIT INTIMIDATING FOR MUSICIANS, BECAUSE IT’S SO TECHNICAL AND THEORETICAL.

It doesn’t have to be. There are people who are not taught and don’t read music, but just absorb their influences. I’m originally from Wakefield, which is just up the road, and I don’t think I would ever have listened to jazz if I’d stayed there my entire life.

IT ALSO HAS A REPUTATION AS NOT BEING ‘COOL’.

I was quite surprised when I came to London and realised there are quite a lot of young people who are certainly very ‘cool’ and are really into jazz. It conjures up images of old blokes, stroking their chins and smoking in dark clubs. But Polar Bear doesn’t live in the jazz mainstream, so I guess our audience is a bit wider.

DOES WORKING ON A COMPUTER LIBERATE OR RESTRICT YOU IN A LIVE SETTING? IMPROVISING MUST BE A CHALLENGE.

When I first started out it was a challenge to play live or improvise, but over time I have developed software which allows me to control sounds using a joypad or a Wii controller. I can also play an instrument through the software, which makes it quite simple to improvise alone or with others. All instruments have restrictions, but usually the most restrictive aspect of an instrument is the player.

WHAT IS YOUR SETUP FOR LIVE PERFORMANCES?

I use Max/MSP, which enables me to write my own sound software. I always loved electroacoustic music, where the basic modus operandi involves taking recorded material and manipulating it, using tape recorders originally. The software I have built allows me to do this on a laptop using pre-recorded or live input. In the studio I use similar techniques, but I use Logic Studio to arrange my compositions.

After learning Max/MSP, which took a couple of years, I started using it to address the problem of laptop musicians not being able to play live. People work around it in different ways, but my way was to make an interface that allows you to physically control what’s going on in the computer. That coincided with me joining Polar Bear. I spent ten years doing gigs with other laptop musicians and it just got a bit boring. Now, whenever I introduce a sound to a live set, the audience can see that sound going into the mic and then being treated in the computer, so it’s easier to follow. I try not to just have sounds coming out of nowhere.

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE CONCEPT BEHIND FORESTER.

The idea is simply that you can drop sounds into the software and it creates a forest. You can navigate through the forest, which creates a changing mix of those sounds. It’s not meant to produce finished pieces, but it can often create inspiring little snippets.

HOW IS THE NEW VERSION GOING?

It’s not really progressing at all at the moment, because I’ve got a lot on. I’ve got a visual interface, which is usually how these things start life, since they personify an idea for a system. It took ages to make it work, because it uses a load of trigonometry and I was never very good at maths.

People wanted more control in the first Forester, so I decided to add that to the second one, but then I came to the realisation that the lack of user control is why people like it. That’s what it has over other software. If you want to do something really controlled, use Logic or Pro Tools or something. It might have no control in one mode, so you just load some sounds in and sit there and watch and listen. It may not even be called Forester, since it’s got more of a sea theme to it this time around.

YOU TRAVELLED UP THE GRAND UNION CANAL LAST YEAR, PERFORMING WITH LISA KNAPP AS CANAL MUSIC. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE AND DID IT GO DOWN WELL WITH AUDIENCES?

I really enjoyed my time with Lisa and she was enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by the computer. I really liked what we ended up with. In fact, I spoke with her on the phone last week about making a studio recording of some of the songs. I think the audiences enjoyed the shows. I was a bit worried that the stuff we were doing might be a bit too far out for some, but I was pleasantly surprised to overhear two excited 60-somethings discussing our use of the hydrophone, an underwater mic.

WHAT INSPIRED THE CANAL CONCEPT?

That was actually suggested by the organisers, Sound UK. It’s not something I or Lisa would have picked. They had this idea that they wanted to do these gigs on a canal boat, so we said we’d give it a go. Lisa played the violin and the banjo and sang, and we both invented some instruments for the show. We made these glasses that were pitched, so Lisa played those while I sampled them. I was playing a floor tom and an autoharp. It was really good because it felt like we pushed ourselves outside what we would normally do.

YOU HAVE A NEW LIVE ALBUM COMING OUT SOON. TELL US A BIT ABOUT THE PROJECT AND HOW IT COMPARES WITH YOUR OTHER RELEASES.

The album’s called **Tunis**, which is where it was recorded. I got asked to do a gig there. The idea was to make field recordings and use them to do the gig, so I was basically improvising with Tunisian sounds. I took the recording home, added some parts in the studio and now it’s all done. It’s quite droney in places. Usually my records are all over the place - really disparate things joined together - but on this there is less oscillation between different styles and it really captures the feeling I had when I was there. A totally different way of working to what I’m used to. I’m usually a bit of a control freak and spend a very, very long time in the studio.

DID YOU ALWAYS PLAN TO RELEASE IT?

The organisers wanted to make a record. I wasn’t really keen on the idea, to be honest. I actually tried to get out of it, but there was a bit of a language barrier, so when I got there they thought it was still on. I decided ‘why not’, because they were nice guys and really into the music.

YOU’VE GOT A LIVE VISUALS SHOW COMING UP IN LIVERPOOL. HOW DID THAT DEVELOP?

A couple of nights, I saw the moon and it looked incredible. So one night I just started filming it - plonked my camera on a tripod and positioned it so the moon rose through the shot and exited out of view. It’s got this amazing arc to it, some sort of beautiful mechanics. It really inspired me, so I decided to write a soundtrack and present it. I’ve never really worked with visuals before. I’m going to try and roll the film and play live in sync. I’m writing the music at the moment. I don’t know how it’s going to turn out, but I think creatively you’ve got to follow your imagination and your obsession.

HAVE YOU GOT ANOTHER STUDIO ALBUM COMING SOON AS WELL?

I’ve been writing songs for a studio album for about two years now, talking to various labels who could take me to new areas in music. But sometimes, if you’re writing and you take a long time, you can go off what you’ve done. That’s what happened to me. Now I’m starting again and trying to find things that interest me. A friend of mine has an art studio in Dorset, close to where PJ Harvey lives, in the middle of the countryside. I recorded some sounds there that are really inspiring, so I’ve been chopping those up and making rhythms, which is something I’ve not done for ages – probably since **Microcontact** (2001). I’d also like to work on integrating the electronic and folk aspects of my music.

LEAFCUTTER JOHN.

COMPUTERS NEVER FELT SO UNPREDICTABLE.

INTERVIEW BY SAM WALBY.





KING MOJO.

SHEFFIELD’S FINEST HIPSTER PROMOTER.

IF YOU ARE A FAN OF FUNK, SOUL, BLUES, FOLK, ROCK AND ROLL, JAZZ, REGGAE, SKA OR HIP HOP, YOU SHOULD HAVE CROSSED PATHS WITH KING MOJO ALREADY. HOSTING TWO MONTHLY EVENTS FILLED TO THE BRIM WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED STYLES, HIS PROMOTIONS COLLECTIVE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FUNKIEST NIGHTS GOING, WELL WORTH THE SMALL DOOR TAX. THE MAN HIMSELF TOLD US ABOUT HIS PSYCHEDELIC MEANDERINGS.

WHAT GOT YOU INTO PROMOTING?

I realised my love for music easily and gave sweet surrender to the fact that I had to be involved. I require it. But even in Sheffield, I struggled to find a place to watch Sixties-inspired live music and a place I could get a groove on to a funky band. The result was starting a night called The Psychedelic Solution at the Red House and a monthly world music club night Upstairs at DQ called Totem Roots.

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BEST AND WORST PROMOTING EXPERIENCES?

I had always wanted to be involved in festivals, so when I was asked to put the live bands on at a festival a few years ago, I happily collated an amazing collection of bands, some of whom had travelled half the country. When we turned up on the day, there were lots of people but still no marquee for the band stage. They had forgotten the poles. That was one of the worst days.

It would be hard to pick the best, but witnessing the sweaty mess of swirling flesh at the Smerin’s Anti-Social Club gig will be a proud memory to hold. Also, doing the main stage for the Peace in the Park Festival.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE SHEFFIELD VENUE?

Without a doubt the best pub in the world is the Red House. It’s off the beaten plastic track, the crowd aren’t just passing through - they’re diggin’, groovin’ and layin’ roots in a place with real atmosphere.

WHICH UPCOMING SHEFFIELD ACTS SHOULD WE BE LISTENING TO?

If they were still upcoming - Lazy Tree Surgeons. Always listen to the rise of King Capisce, but for something new, the one is The Mother Folkers.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT MUSIC IN SHEFFIELD?

There’s a community spirit cut from a bucolic cloth, a soulfulness that transcends genre. As long as you can side-step what the mainstream media hype as ‘the Sheffield music scene’ and discover what’s burning on the underground, you will find something suitably spectacular.

HAVE YOU GOT ANY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE PUTTING ON THEIR OWN NIGHTS?

Music is what feelings sounds like. Don’t bother unless you love what you’re promoting, because you need the energy and enthusiasm of your passion to complete the vibe of an event. Look after the acts and do something different.

As Mencius mused, “If the King loves music, it is well with the land”.

myspace.com/kingmojopromotions

WHAT’S ON.

NOVEMBER LISTINGS.

Now Then will never be a listings magazine. We just don’t have the time, space or will to print everything that is going on in Sheffield, month to month. Besides, not everything is worth your time. Here are some events that we believe are.

JEHST & KLASHNEKOFF @THE HARLEY

4th November.

£8 adv / £10 otd.

Hip hop heavyweights don’t come to these parts too frequently, so it’s advised that you check them out when they do.

PLANET ZOGG @THE PLUG

5th November.

£8 adv, £10 otd.

Your regular dose of psytrance, techno and breaks, this month delivered via Plastic Vibe, Kristian, Trific and residents.

BATHS @THE FORUM

10th November.

Free.

21-year-old LA resident producing exciting beats with a pop sensibility.

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THEATRE.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.
14TH OCTOBER. LANTERN THEATRE.
REVIEWER – SARA HILL.



Following last month's review of Hamlet, we at Now Then were feeling positively cultured. So when kindly offered the chance to review the new production of Much Ado About Nothing at the Lantern Theatre, we couldn't snap up those tickets fast enough, and a fabulous evening was had.

The Dilys Guite Players are an amateur theatre group who have been going strong since 1957 and the talented cast pulled off an ambitious production with wit and verve.

One of the most famous of Shakespeare's comedies, the play revolves around two couples - Claudio & Hero and Beatrice & Benedick - the former falling victim to the twisted machinations of the villainous Don John and the latter struggling to overcome their apparent hatred of each other to discover the love beneath.

The four romantic leads all performed admirably and special mention must go to Rob Myles as Benedick, whose anti-love and marriage ranting monologues never failed to raise a chuckle, particularly upon realising his love when, as if born, he talked himself into a total reversal of opinion. The sparks between Benedick and Annie Bethell's Beatrice flew and perfectly counterpointed the straighter performances of Jamie Nuttall and Ami Crofts as Claudio and Hero respectively.

This is not to disparage the other cast members, who each appeared at home in their roles. The trio of older characters overseeing the proceedings - Bill Darwin, Simon Atherton and Frank Abel - exuded confidence all over the stage and TJ Browne's Don John smoldered and smirked as every good bad guy should.

Out and out comedy characters come of course in the guise of Dogberry and Verges (Jonathon Syer and Steve Eddison), whose performances at times felt perilously close to over the top, but each time were saved with just the right amount of knowing tongue in cheekiness.

The traditional production was helped along by a sumptuous set design and the wonderful atmosphere of the Lantern Theatre itself. Nestled snugly in a leafy residential street close to Nether Edge, the Victorian building is full of rich history and character. The small auditorium makes for an intimate atmosphere and ensures no nuance of expression from the actors is missed. Run entirely by volunteers, this is a Sheffield institution that needs support.

Their new Artistic Director, Martin Derbyshire, is presenting his inaugural season and with performers ranging from award-winning professional companies such as Found Theatre to blues musicians, there will be something for everyone. Unfortunately Much Ado About Nothing only runs till 23rd of October, so if you haven't already seen it you've missed a good'un, but there's plenty more to come.

Visit lanterntheatre.org.uk to learn more and get involved.

Book & Lyrics by **L. Arthur Rose**
and **Douglas Furber**
Music by **Noel Gay**
Book revised by **Stephen Fry**
Contributions to revisions by **Mike Ockrent**



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MACHETE.

There's something remarkably comforting about Machete, Robert Rodriguez's latest flick. Such comfort finds its source in a variety of aspects and is definitely rooted in my early film indoctrination (the more illicit side of it, at least).

It harks back to sun-drenched afternoons in Lisbon, during which some errand with my father would turn into an impromptu matinee viewing of utterly obscure action films. These would invariably be thinly plotted tales of revenge punctuated with over-the-top violence and nudity aplenty – ingredients which were fittingly served in an old 1920s art deco cinema named Odéon (no relation), located right across from the even older Olympia, which I could always just admire from the outside as it featured continuous sessions of hardcore films. And, although I would definitely be too young to watch the majority of what was projected in those battered scratched prints at 'our Odeon', I would relish every 25 frames of it.

It would not surprise me if Rodriguez has a similar (Mexican equivalent) reminiscence, because Machete emulates everything that those films managed to do with a minute fraction of his \$20 million movie.

The film began its existence as a fake trailer in Grindhouse (2007), the double feature comprising of Death Proof by Quentin Tarantino and Planet Terror by Rodriguez himself. Yet the idea goes as far back as the director's first collaboration with the actor Danny Trejo in Desperado (1995), during which he seems to have thought to himself: "This guy should be like the Mexican Jean Claude Van Damme or Charles Bronson, putting out a movie every year and his name should be Machete."

Fifteen years later, the film is released and its major strength is undeniably Trejo's presence and performance. Even when everything else surrounding him verges on the far-fetched or completely ridiculous, he's always believable and, more importantly, human. He's also the owner of tremendous, pock-marked features, which encase heartbreakingly vulnerable eyes and were celebrated by Rodriguez years ago in a public championing of digital technology.

The rest of the cast can easily be labeled as 'damaged goods', as they are mostly known for turbulent lives in the public eye or very uneven careers in film - from Jeff Fahey to Lindsay Lohan, Michelle Rodriguez to Steven Seagal, with the humoristic touch of 'introducing Don Johnson' in the credits and the prestigious appearance of Robert De Niro, who very few still take seriously these days.

To judge Machete by today's standards and conventions is a mistake that only those unacquainted with the Grindhouse approach or who find it an exotic object of mild historical curiosity can make. Those were films that, along with my personal description above, were grimy, misogynistic and hyperbolic to say the least. They targeted the viewer's most basic responses as a means to compensate for the lack of budget. Surely the ramifications of women's lib were being felt beyond the confinements of the cinemas which screened them in double bills, but these were films about unapologetic masculinity – not least for the amount of guns involved. And I must say Rodriguez does stick to them and more in his eulogy.

The film opens with Machete en route to rescue a hostage against orders from above. As he literally barges in, the hostage is a naked girl (because "it's too hot for clothes") who eventually double-crosses him.

The tongue-in-cheekness of her attempts to seduce him is halted at the point at which she stabs him and then exacerbated beyond measure when she gets a mobile phone from her vagina to call her alleged captors. What ensues is Machete seeing his wife decapitated before his eyes, and the 'having nothing to lose' aspect of his character is laid out for the rest of the film.

The grotesque humour comes unexpectedly and always within contexts that dare to entertain you for all the wrong reasons. The highlight of this has to be the scene in the hospital, where two twin nurses learn about the extraordinary length of the human intestine. Soon after - and during a confrontation with henchmen out to get him - Machete swiftly disembowels one of them and uses his small intestine to swing out through a nearby window and down through another one onto the floor below. Yeah, I know...

Still, with the risk of having invalidated my next point altogether, I will dare to say that Machete touches upon some serious social issues, such as illegal immigration. It does so by combining myth (in the shape of the revolutionary character Shé, who Michelle Rodriguez grows to embody) with a sense of community (that Hispanics tend to have wherever they go and that here is symbolised by the Network and its call to arms at the right time), and with the exposure of American political convenience tempered with enough hypocrisy and prejudice.

Back to the filmmaking side of it, Robert Rodriguez shares the directing credit with Ethan Maniquis, editor some of his previous work. The last time he had done it (at the cost of his Director's Guild of America membership) had been in the adaptation of the cult comic strip Sin City (2005), which was co-directed by its author, Frank Miller. That film is, undeniably, the most accomplished piece in an otherwise inconsistent career.

But, love him or hate him, this very same career has been made possible by Rodriguez using his early commercial success to become self-sufficient production-wise, which in turn had him taking charge of many filmmaking departments himself and therefore enabling projects that are so cost-effective that profit is always guaranteed for the studio.

The greatest achievement of Machete, as it was of Planet Terror, is a sense of both authority and authenticity in its 'worn-out and discarded' aesthetics. This certainly comes from the great precision and endearing enthusiasm with which Rodriguez embraces and glorifies them. And, although Planet Terror got the worst deal in the Grindhouse double-bill, with Tarantino's counterpart being praised and eventually released on its own, it's unlikely that Machete will be as 'well received'. After all, anything close to a zombie is far cuddlier than Mexicans brandishing sharp weapons in this day and age.

JOÃO PAULO SIMÕES IS A PORTUGUESE FILMMAKER LIVING AND WORKING INDEPENDENTLY IN SHEFFIELD. HIS WORKS INCLUDE ANTLERS OF REASON AND AN ARRAY OF MUSIC VIDEOS AND DOCUMENTARIES. CAPTURAFILMES.BLOGSPOT.COM



THE SOCIAL NETWORK.

Reviewer – Alex Keegan.

You've heard it countless times before: Facebook has changed the way in which we socially interact. For the first time we are able to know almost everything about a person without having to leave our computers, all whilst still possessing an ounce of dignity. Surely it's not really stalking if you're only trawling someone's tagged photos, rather than hiding outside said person's house, clutching a pair of binoculars?

This ingenious networking tool was arguably devised by young computer whiz Mark Zuckerberg, and it is the notorious controversies surrounding the property rights of Facebook that form the crux of The Social Network. I know what you're thinking – "Oh a film about Facebook, how very 'relevant' and 'topical'"; but I come bearing surprising news – it's actually rather good.

Filmed in a restrained digital palette, the audience is invited into a world of exclusive parties and societies orchestrated by the Harvard elite. Zuckerberg is represented as one who despises such elitism and in a passion-fuelled evening creates a site allowing fellow students to rate the attractiveness of their female contemporaries. This infuriates his ex-girlfriend, along with the rest of the Harvard University female population, so in an attempt to reinstate his reputation among his peers, he teams up with the chiselled and privileged 'Winklevoss' twins (who refer to themselves as Winklevi in the plural) to create a revolutionary social networking tool. Working unashamedly behind their back, Zuckerberg teams up with roommate Eduardo and the pair spend months tirelessly developing 'The Facebook'. The film veers between two interchanging sections – the ensuing expansion and exponential growth of Facebook's popularity, and the court cases in which Eduardo and the Winklevi attempt to sue Zuckerberg for the intellectual property rights to the site.

The performances are top notch, with Jesse Eisenberg in the lead role, managing to transcend his reputation as a 'serious Michael Cera' to portray the unrelenting yet sympathetic Zuckerberg. A surprise appearance from Justin Timberlake as the convincingly parasitic Sean Parker (founder of Napster) is a perfect example of when the transition from pop star to movie actor can work wonders. Young Brit Andrew Garfield (as Eduardo) proves that he may very well be the right choice as the next Spiderman. With seasoned auteur David Fincher at its helm (of Fight Club/Se7en/The Curious Case of Benjamin Button fame), The Social Network works pleasantly well as a stand-alone piece of cinema, not for a minute cowering in the shadow of the mighty Internet giant, but instead managing to turn a series of potentially mundane events (mostly people hunched around a computer or a courtroom desk) into compelling viewing.

It is undeniable that Facebook has demolished any sense of privacy that was before held sacred to one's personal life, and it's almost impossible to withhold from creating a Facebook profile for fear of being socially alienated. But despite Fincher failing to tackle some of the meatier ethical topics that have inevitably become apparent due to the site's popularity, The Social Network is satisfying enough a work to justify its filming a mere six years after Facebook's conception.



THE LANTERN THEATRE.

18 KENWOOD PARK ROAD.
LANTERNTHEATRE.ORG.UK
0114 2362608.

The Lantern is an old Victorian theatre in Nether Edge, originally built at the turn of the century by a rich steel manufacturer for his own amusement. But after his death it fell into disrepair and by the 50s was consumed by overgrown shrubbery. The then owner, Charles Richardson, was approached by local drama teacher and actress Dilys Guite, who wanted to restore the building to its former glory. Guite agreed rent with Richardson in May 1957 and began the restoration with the help of a small group of enthusiastic Sheffielders. The result is what you see today – a unique Grade II listed venue with intimacy and history in abundance.

Initially, the space was reserved solely for the Dilys Guite Players, but the last ten years have seen them open it up to other amateur drama groups, promoters, bands and performers of all kinds. This little rarity often seems to slip under the radar and in our opinion that is unjust. With a capacity of just 84, it has a strange homeliness to it without ever feeling claustrophobic or cramped. And with a fully licensed bar and coffee lounge, you won't be parched neither.

There's always loads going on at the Lantern, but this month keep your eye out for the Bar Steward Blues Brothers Band on 5th November, Found Theatre's adaptation of Charles Dickens' ghost story The Signalman on 8th November, and Thick as Thieves on 20th November, a dark comedy about small-time criminals by Mark Whiteley. Those of you with Crimbo already on the mind should pencil 19th December into your diaries, as Southey Musical Theatre Company will be hosting a Christmas concert, with carols and songs for all ages (and abilities).

The New Year will undoubtedly bring new performances and shows to the Lantern, but if you don't like the look of any of them, why not hire the place and put on your own? You can even hire costumes.

One last thing – the theatre's roof is looking a bit a worse for wear and needs to be replaced soon. As you can imagine, this is more work since the building is listed, with the estimated cost being placed at £30,000. To find out more or to make a donation for the roof restoration, visit lanterntheatre.org.uk.

THE WASHINGTON.

79 FITZWILLIAM STREET.
0114 2761960.

The Washington (or 'the Washy', as you may have heard it called) has been known for many reasons throughout the years, from a notorious hang out for the musicians of Sheffield such as Messrs Hawley and Cocker, through to perhaps the largest collection of teapots in the city. Yep, teapots. More recently though, it has become known as a spring-board for emerging musical talent in the city, having provided a grassroots platform for the likes of Wet Nuns and the Death Rays of Ardilla, with the trend set to continue into November and beyond.

This support for fledgling musicians is also extended across the creative spectrum, with arms open to artists, writers and poets all, and a massively approachable team to work with too.

The attitude of the Washy's staff and promoters is a huge part of the place's appeal and the sense of straight-up honesty rings out. There is no veneer of 'cool' or pretence here, the décor is minimal and it doesn't claim to be an upmarket wine bar. What it is, put simply, is a pub with a great atmosphere and a raucous, music-loving crowd.

Out back there's an amply sized, enclosed beer garden with seating, all decked out in graff-style wall art in which you can enjoy a fag in relative comfort, right up to one in the morning and two on weekends.

There's also a decent diversity to what's on offer - ranging from heavy blues to magazine launches to psyche-folk and Americana - so if you are a promoter, DJ, artist or musician, we strongly recommend a chat with Rob, who is well keen to continue to establish the 'you saw it here first' ideals of the venue.

If the above applies to you, pop in or call after 4pm. If not, get down there and enjoy their efforts. You're more likely to meet a contented Liberal Democrat in Sheffield than be asked to pay at the door, too.

FAVOURITES.

OUR PICK OF THE BUNCH.

SHEFFIELD SUSTAINABLE KITCHENS.

SHEFFIELDSUSTAINABLEKITCHENS.CO.UK

This local firm does everything it can to keep its environmental impact as low as possible while designing, supplying and fitting custom kitchens across the region. No mean feat really, considering the range of materials that make up a good culinary space. All of their timber is sustainably sourced and clients can choose from a range of worktops made from recycled glass, bamboo and even old coffee cups.

Online testimonials consistently comment on the friendliness of the bespoke service, carried out by a conscientious and hard-working team who are happy to accommodate all design requests and can also turn their eye to bedrooms, bathrooms and more.

For more information, contact Rob Cole on 07967365677 / robjnc@yahoo.co.uk.

OTTO'S RESTAURANT.

244 SHARROW VALE ROAD.
0114 2669147.
OTTOSRESTAURANT.CO.UK

Otto's is a Moroccan restaurant nestled in the Sharrow Vale Road independent hub. Run by Mr and Mrs Damahi, the owners of the successful Mediterranean Restaurant further up the road, this is the place to go for authentic traditional dishes like harira soup, couscous and the glorious lamb tagine stew, as well as more Mediterranean choices like risotto, pasta and kataifi.

Currently going down a storm is their Party Menu, which offers a three-course meal and tea or coffee for £22.50 per eater. You can bring your own wine or beer, or peruse their alcohol section in the downstairs restaurant. Their private function room is also well equipped for events large and small, from intimate candlelit dinners to jubilant celebrations and merriment of all kinds. Vegetarian, halal and coeliac-friendly options could seal the deal.

SMART VENUE COFFEE.

100-104 LONDON ROAD.
0114 2767671.

It has now been over a year since the Smart Venue threw its hat into the ring of bustling trade that is London Road, with stiff competition from some well-established coffee shops and eateries in the near vicinity. But they are now doing better where the aforementioned mainstays have folded in the wake of the two major chains that arrived on the scene six months ago.

Smart Venue is run with both ethics and quality as top priorities, offering all Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance-certified coffees, with reasonably priced, locally sourced sandwiches and hearty homemade soups. Add this to the fact that it is part of the First Step Trust, which helps people to get back into the workplace in a safe and friendly environment, and they get a perfect ten from us. Double dip recession? Give this team a triple dip with sprinkles and they'll still be going strong.

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS MARKET.

KELHAM ISLAND INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM.
ALMA STREET, S3 8RY. 0114 2722106.
SIMT.CO.UK

This December sees the 19th annual Victorian Christmas Market held at Kelham Island Industrial Museum and it is set to be the biggest and best to date. The event runs from the 4th to the 5th of December and as well as hosting an epic 100 independent stalls for all your unique Christmas gift needs, it will hold demonstrations of traditional skills, put on loads of family activities and comes all wrapped up in period costume with no shortage of sooty faces.

A great experience for those with eager-minded nippers in tow, but also for all discerning shoppers looking for something refreshingly different to fill the stockings of their nearest and dearest.

The museum itself is one of Sheffield's true treasures and an opportunity to see it in all its festive glory is not to be missed. Tickets are available online at 4 quid, kids get in free.

MOOCH.

199 WHITHAM ROAD.
BROOMHILL.
0114 2662255.

Mooch is a long-time supporter of Now Then and frankly we think they're ace. We also think that you readers out there should pay them a visit. Mooch is located on the main Broomhill highway and is a real treasure trove of gorgeous goodies, from unusual jewellery to handmade gift cards, beanbags to soaps and candles - all at a reasonable price. In fact, by quoting 'Now Then' this month, you'll receive 10% off the asking price, so go grab those Christmas gifts early, rather than the night before as usual. You know who you are...

Worth a little attention from the ladies in particular this month is the fact that Mooch is the exclusive stockist of Nice Girl Really jewellery, the brainchild of international designer Holly Hendry and well worth checking out for that special someone, be it a loved one or just yourself.

CORPORATION T-SHIRT DESIGN COMPETITION.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE, 2 MILTON STREET.
CORPORATION.ORG.UK

An opportunity has arisen for all you artists and designers out there. Corporation nightclub is currently running a T-shirt design competition for local artists, with only the best selected to be sold in limited numbers to Corp fans in Sheffield and beyond. A great medium to get your artwork out there and seen by all and sundry.

Corporation have recently featured the work of Brendon Dooney, among many others. To be the next in line, send your designs to stuart@corporation.org.uk.

yes indeed



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35. SMART COFFEE VENU
36. OLD CROWN
37. CAFE EURO

NETHEREDGE

38. THE LANTERN THEATRE

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39. ABBEYDALE BREWERY
40. THE BOHEMIAN
41. GOAL SOUL

